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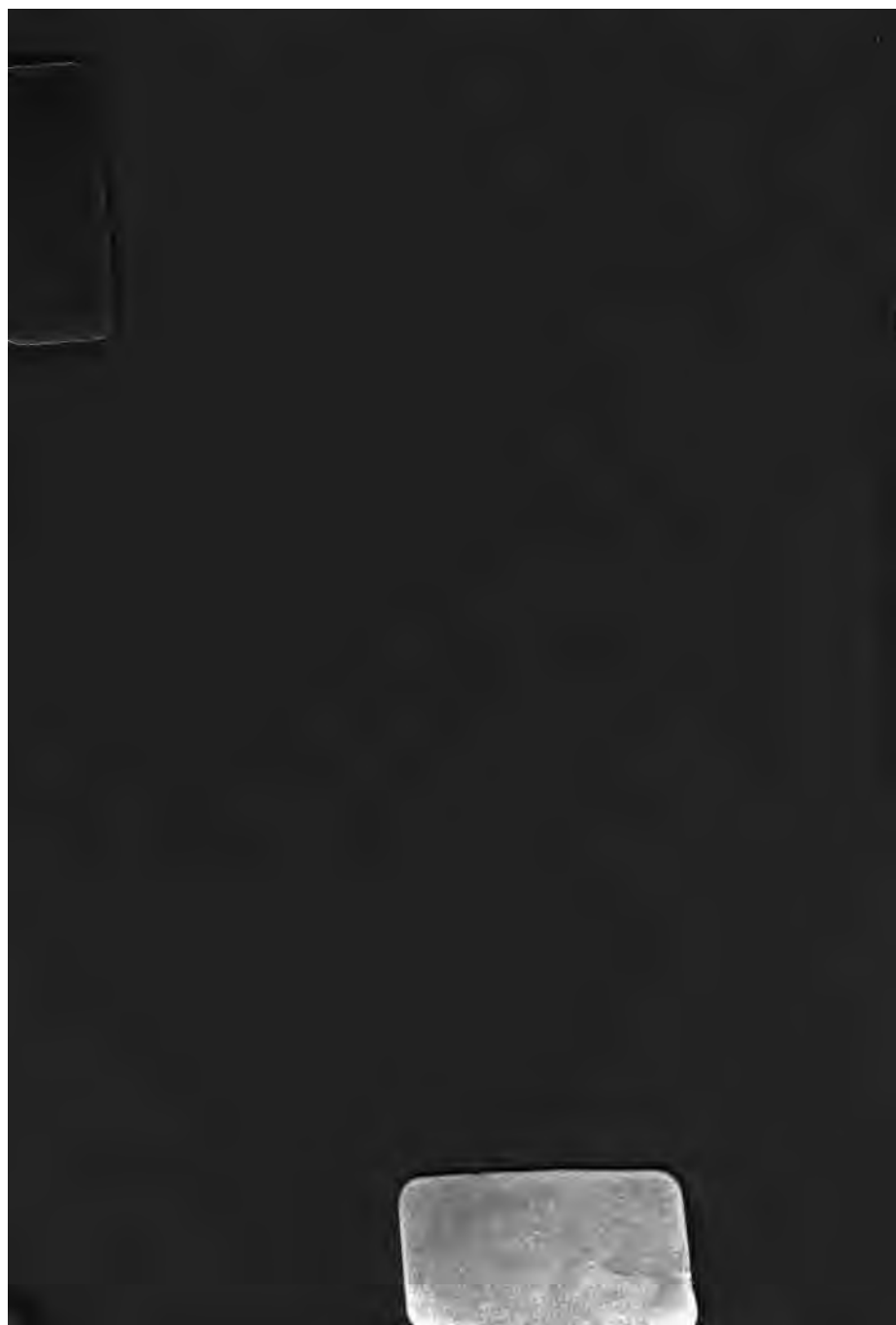


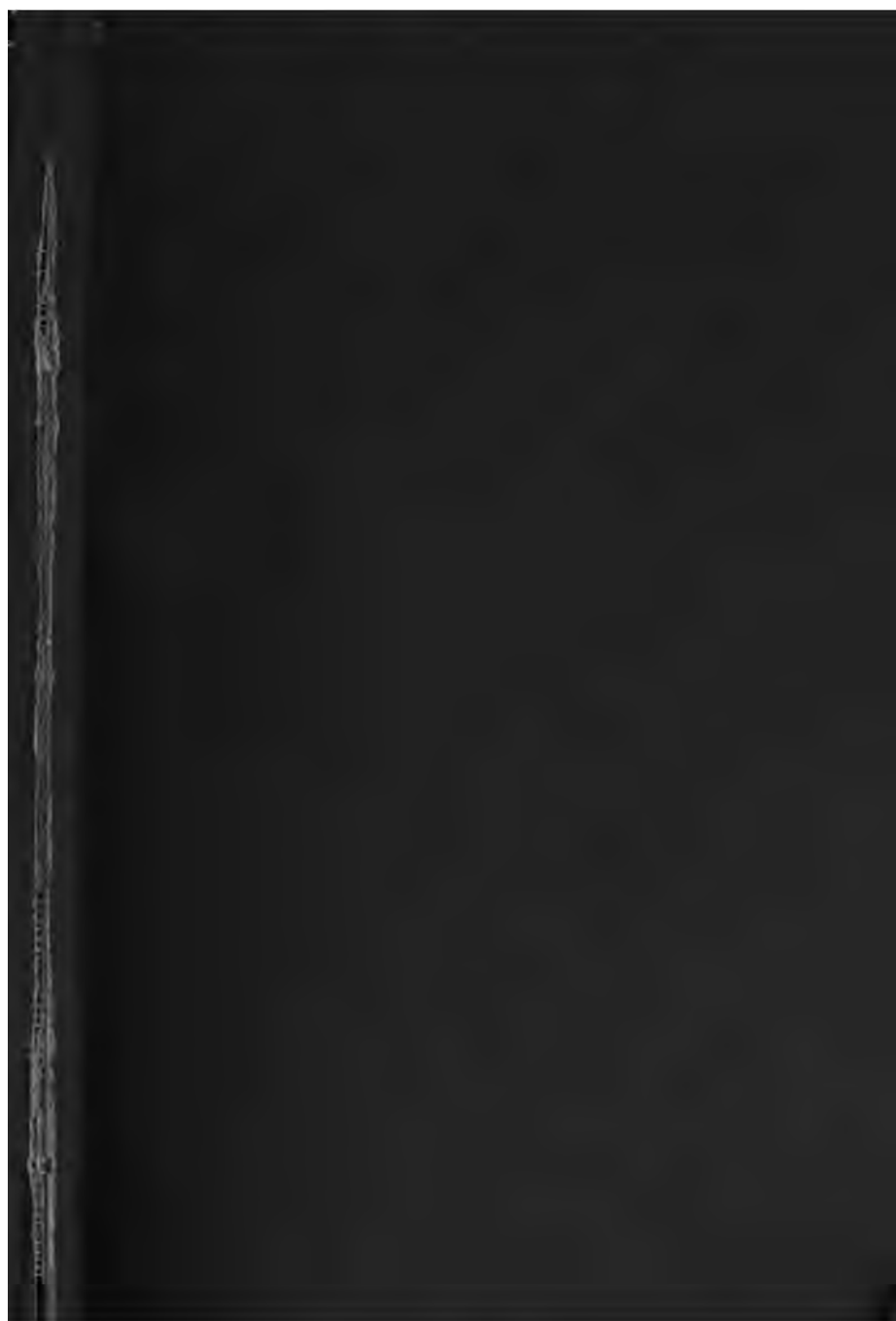
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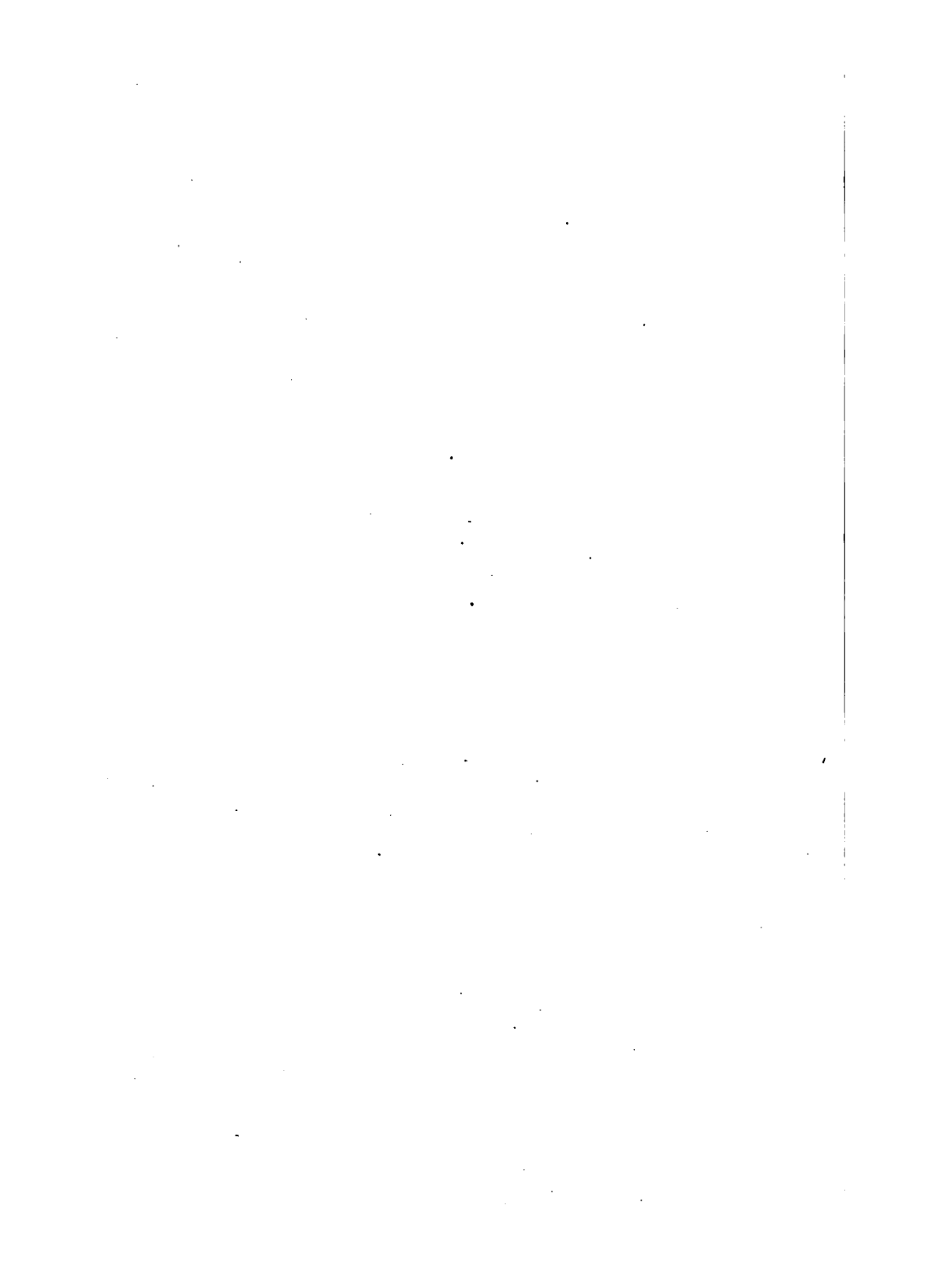


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TO THE SAXON READER.

Mr. Butler's Ward was born in Ireland, but her life, after childhood, was passed in other climes. She leaves her native land at the close of the Introduction, and thenceforth agrarian matters play no part in her history:

MR. BUTLER'S WARD.

INTRODUCTION.

It was past ten o'clock, and not a market night, yet there was someone on the Ballymoneyboy road. By ten the people of Ballymoneyboy were in bed; no one would be out at such an hour save on grave business, least of all would they be abroad on such a night—a night so dark that, without a lanthorn, one could not see one's footing. Still there was someone on the road—someone, moreover, whose country clothes revealed that he was neither priest nor doctor, but who, so far as one could judge by the misty and uncertain glare of his lanthorn, belonged to the farming class.

The night was black as pitch, and cold with the raw coldness of a wet, windy January night; but the man tramped steadily on, unmoved by rain and wind, or the sad roar of the Atlantic as its waves broke upon the rocks.

On the man tramped, till another and a steadier ray of light fell across the road—a light thrown from the windows of a small house which stood quite alone by the wayside. There was a light in the downstairs room, and a gleam also shot through the curtains of one of the upper windows. "So the child's still sick," thought the traveller, as he went up to the house door and rapped upon it with his stick. There was no need to knock; before he reached the house the watchdogs were alert and barking; the light in the lower window moved and disappeared, and then the door was opened by a sad-faced

man of about forty. He gave no greeting to his visitor, nor did he bid him enter; he stood there quite still and silent, a melancholy and forbidding presence, barring the entrance with his figure. It was the traveller who spoke at last.

"'Tis about the cottiers, Hanlon," he said, "that I would be speakin'."

"It should be something important, Misther Dineen, to bring ye out at such an hour," rejoined Hanlon in a resentful tone.

"Ye know what it is that I'm meanin'. Ye know well, Hanlon, that I'm here to tell ye that I'll not be tampered with. For what do ye think I gave ye notus to quit, av not becas I knew what ye'd be afther doin'. I knew——"

A slight smile stole over Hanlon's features, a smile that was almost a sneer, and which expressed to his visitor all the contempt and scorn and hatred with which the farmer's soul was filled. Probably the smile was meant to be annoying; if so, it succeeded, for Dineen went on in a voice of almost uncontrollable passion.

"D'ye think I'll be baulked by ye and yer kind, Daniel Hanlon? D'ye think I'll forget that ye came between me an' Anna? I'll not be standin' by while ye upset ahl authority. No; an' by heaven, av there's wan cottier in yer barn on Saturday, out ye will go on Monday, and them along with ye."

His voice, spent with fury, died away, and for a time the men looked at each other in silence. Then Hanlon said quite quietly, "Well, it's a bittur night. Av ye're finished, Misther Dineen, I'll be shuttin' the door."

"So that is your answer! Ye'll be shuttin' the door! This day week, Daniel Hanlon, ye'll have no door to shut. Now, be a sensible man," he cried, suddenly changing his tone. "Ye'll do no manner a' good by such pigheadudness; the cottiers must go; their holdin's are let. It's merely a queshun whether ye stay or I turn ye out with 'em."

"It's a queshun whether my home is mine or yours, Misther Dineen. It's a queshun whether ye have power to make me

refuse sheltur to twenty destitute creatures. This house should be no home to me nor to my wife av we could not sheltur whom we wished. So long as it is my home I shall ask whom I choose within ut, and," he added pointedly, "I will refuse whom I choose to enter ut. What," he continued, without heeding Dineen's interruption, "what, I would like to know, a' thouse poor people done that they are turned out into the snow. They paid their rints, and they were great fools to do ut, for they were most exorbidant rints. They a' been far better tenants than Misther Butler is a landlord; an' now, just because ye tell 'um to lay the land down in grass, out they must go without wan penny a' compensation, for ahl the labour and money they have laid out on the soil."

"Misther Butler says they've not given enough rent," said Dineen, sullenly.

"And for why?" cried the other angrily. "For why is not Misther Butler contint wi' the rint? Thomas Dineen, answer me that. Av ever you pay to Misther Butler wan half——"

"Misther Butler won't have 'em on the estate," said the bailiff quickly.

"Misther Butler knows just nothing at ahl about ut."

"Ye call me a liar, Dan Hanlon? D'ye think that will make me pardon ye?"

"I ask ye no pardon, Dineen; I have done ye no wrong."

Argument was wasted on Hanlon, and it was piercing cold on the step. Dineen turned half away.

"Then ye are determined to go out on Monday, Hanlon?"

"I'm deturmined not to send the cottiers from my barn."

"Change yer moind av ye value yer holdin'."

"I nivur change me moind," replied Hanlon, shutting the door. Then, by a sudden impulse, sufficiently inconsistent with that statement, he opened it, and crossing the threshold, cried, "Dineen!"

The man turned, and Hanlon went out to meet him.

"Dineen," he said, "I have little love for ye, but as ye value yer life, don't provoke the vengeance a' desperate men."

"The table's turned!" cried Dineen, laughing loudly. "My loife against yer holdin'. Ye think to intimidate me by that suggistion?"

"Ye may place that manin' on it av ye choose," said the other, turning towards his house. "Ye have had a fair warnin'."

Dineen laughed, closed Hanlon's gate, and went homewards; but so soon as the door shut and the light disappeared from the lower window of the farmhouse, he turned round, climbed over the stone wall on the far side of the road, and cut across the fields in the direction of the town of Bally-moneyboy. He thought far more seriously of Hanlon's warning than he acknowledged. The man's whole manner had been defiant, and for months past there had been ill-will between himself and the farmer. A woman was the cause of this ill-feeling, though the woman in this case was no older a person than Hanlon's sixteen-year-old daughter Anna. Dineen, who was a widower, had fallen in love with the young girl, and asked to marry her. She did not like the man, and Hanlon had no ambition that his child should become the second Mrs. Dineen. He sent the girl from home, and told Dineen plainly that she would never return till he renounced his suit. The bailiff was not used to being balked, and hated the farmer for his interference; so he was glad when, by giving shelter to the evicted cottiers, Hanlon furnished him a chance of revenge.

Though he had laughed at the farmer's warning, Dineen knew in his heart that it was not meant merely as an intimidation, but had been honestly given. He imagined that the man knew of some design to murder him. Hanlon would not stoop so low as to murder him himself, but it did not follow that he would inform against those who would. Dineen certainly would have informed against no one whom he sus-

pected of a wish to remove Hanlon, and he was conscious of being morally very superior to the farmer. Moreover, it was possible that the man might intend to resist his eviction by force, else why had he laid so much stress on the words, "I will refuse whom I choose to enter it?" "He is a fool to be showin' his hand so plainly," muttered Dineen to himself as he stumbled over the slushy fields. "He's given me a warnin', and I will take ut. I shall see justus is done in spite a' Hanlon or anny other man."

Mr. Dineen was a staunch upholder of the law, or, as he preferred to call it, "justus," and why should he not, since law and justice are synonymous in this enlightened empire? He was at this time nearly forty years of age, and could therefore remember the passing, repealing, lapsing, and repassing of a good many laws, but to his mind the law was always just. At this particular time there was a law forbidding persons to keep firearms in their dwellings, and another authorising the police to search the houses of those who were suspected of secreting arms, or of being concerned in murders and outrages. But in Dineen's neighbourhood the officials were loath to exercise these legal powers, and only a few houses, those of notorious Fenians, had been searched in Ballymoneyboy. Left to themselves, the police would certainly never have thought of visiting Hanlon's farm. But on the information of a neighbour—of the man who was known to be courting the farmer's daughter, though his duty to his master forced him to evict the girl's father—on the information of a man like Dineen what less could they do than search the house?

Having performed the part of informer, our friend Thomas turned back to walk, in the teeth of the piercing wind, the three and a half miles that lay between Ballymoneyboy and his own home. He entered no whisky store; he took no potheen to drive out the cold, not because he was a follower of Father Mathew, but because he was debarred from these pleasures by the same consideration which had prompted

him to visit the police barrack after nightfall and on foot, namely, a desire to keep his business a secret. For no personal gain, for no private advantage, had he taken a seven-mile walk in the cold and darkness; but modesty, humility, or some other feeling prompted him to do this good deed in secret, and he returned as he had gone, across the lonely miry fields.

Yes, whatever may have been the private feelings of those who knew him towards Thomas Dineen, justice to his memory demands that we should acknowledge that he was actuated by that spirit of self-denial and mortification which has, throughout all ages, distinguished noble souls. If St. Simon Stylites had kept a wife or daughter on the top of his pillar, we might perhaps have heard more of her sufferings from the irritability of the recluse's temper than of his sanctity. How many of the hermits, I wonder, would have been famed for aught but ill-temper had they been family men? Austerity of life and mortification of the flesh are virtues trying to the temper, and the ascetic saints of old were wise to live apart, where their defects of temper hurt no one, and served, perhaps, to foster that wonderful humility which was so fair an adornment to their rigid lives. But Tom Dineen was not a recluse. There is no wife, but a little eight-year-old daughter, waiting on the top of his pillar. His feet, his hands, his face are numbed with cold; his limbs are weary and his stomach empty, so that we will not, I think, enter his hospitable home to-night.

* The Hanlons' farm is a more peaceable, but no less unhappy, dwelling this winter evening. The barns are filled with the homeless wretches whose leases—like Hanlon's own—fell in some fifteen years before, and who since then had been living under almost perpetual notice to quit. With no security for their tenure, and always rented above their means, the cottiers had failed to improve their land, to manure it or till it properly. Year after year they had sown potatoes in "lazy beds," which year after year had yielded smaller and

smaller crops. Poverty had increased, and not only poverty but idleness had been fostered by the disastrous management pursued on Mr. Butler's estate. At length the impoverished earth had refused to yield her increase; rent had not been paid, and the cottiers had been swept away to make room for a large grazier, who, having procured a long lease, could afford to put money into the poor exhausted land. Out the cottiers had gone—out in the depth of winter; friendless and forlorn they had crowded upon the roadside till Hanlon, touched by their misery, had offered shelter till the spring-time to any that wanted it.

The farmer knew right well that the scraps of ill-tilled land could never keep the poor creatures; he had always been stern and harsh to those whose idleness was in part to blame for their poverty. He himself worked hard to keep his family, and to give his sons an education that would fit them for some more profitable business than farming rackrented land. His wife, too, worked hard, and lazy labourers did not stay long in Hanlon's service. But he and his wife had ever been good to the poor. The sluggard and the drunkard they despised, but the thin wife, and the weeping hungry children had always been welcome to milk and potatoes at Ross Farm. And now that sorrow had fallen on all, all were alike welcome, no matter what their virtues or their failings, to shelter in Hanlon's barn. He asked no questions; he sought to know nothing about his guests, and thus it happened that bad men as well as good slept under his roof. He trusted all alike; he barred no windows and he locked no doors. Nor was his confidence abused: nothing, not even a bit of bread, was taken from his kitchen.

About the time that the cottiers had had their notice, he and Dineen, never warm friends, had had their disagreement on the tender subject of Miss Anna, and the bailiff in revenge had given his neighbour notice to quit. Until latterly Hanlon had not thought that the warning was given seriously, but when at Christmas the cottiers were turned out, and he

had sheltered them, Dineen swore that unless Hanlon sent them adrift he too should be turned out. His notice had expired, and it was in the bailiff's power to evict him at any moment. This power Dineen resolved to exercise. Since the dispute about Anna his dislike to Hanlon had grown into hatred. He was rejoiced to think that he had procured for the farmer not only the misery of an eviction from the farm on which he and his father had been born, but also the humiliation, of a search for arms. His one regret was that Mick and Dan were at school, and that Anna had been sent from home out of his way; the absence of Hanlon's eldest children, Dineen rightly guessed, would greatly lessen his humiliation at the trials he must undergo.

But there was sorrow enough in Hanlon's dwelling. Under this roof his children had been born; under this roof even now one lay sick, nigh unto death. To leave the old home would be but a trifling sorrow if only Johnny lived. But whilst he was talking with Dineen, Hanlon heard his sick boy's moans and his wife's tender voice as she comforted her child. There were five older and one younger than Johnny, but the sick one was the dearest. Ah! if the eviction should turn the scale to the side of death.

"Will I be turnin' out the cottiers, Mary?" asked the farmer when he told his wife of the interview with Dineen. It was a hard question to put to the anguished mother. For a moment she stood silent; then, with tears raining down her face, she said, "No, Dan." She could say no more, but her eyes gazed first on the child on her knee, then on that other mother's Son, whose image, crucified, hung on the wall. It was not in Hanlon's nature to know what those words cost his wife. Such sacrifices are appreciated not at all on earth; for the sake of those who make them, we must believe there is a heaven.

For two or three days after Dineen's visit all went on quietly at the farm; the child lay sick, neither better nor worse, and in their anxiety the parents took little heed of the

passage of nights and days. At length one evening he fell into a healthy sleep, such as he had not had for weeks; he slept so peacefully that the parents found out that their watching had made them very weary. They went to bed and slept, the mother still listening in her sleep for Johnny's waking cry. Suddenly they were aroused by the watchdog's barking and the sound of hoofs and wheels on the road outside. The father sprang up and opened the casement.

"Hi!" shouted a voice from out of the darkness, "unlock this gate. We have a search-warrant." But the constable who made this little speech concluded it close to the house door, for the gate yielded to his touch. "Just come down, Mr. Hanlon," he cried, looking up at the window, "and unfasten the door."

Hanlon saw there were two cars in the road, and that those who had ridden on them had divided into two parties; four men stood in front of his door, and the rest were moving towards the yard. "Have a care. Wan a' the dogs is loose, and he'll be afther —"

"My men can take care of themselves," cried he who had spoken before. "Come down and open this — door."

"Be as quiet as ye can. Me choild is sick, but the door is not locked," and the window closed as noiselessly as it had opened.

The constable pressed the lock and entered, bidding his followers be as silent as possible over their work. One was stationed on the stairs to see that no one left the bedrooms, and the other three searched the downstairs premises. A family who lived at free quarters in the back-kitchen came out wailing and dismayed, but beyond frightening these people the downstairs search was absolutely barren, and an ambassador from the outbuildings reported that so far nothing had been found in them.

"It's in their bedroom that the hidin' place will be, I'm thinkin'," said the sentinel. "Ahl the toime I've been here they ha' been movin' about very saftly."

"Ah," said the superintendent, "but the child's sick—maybe the child is made of wood and iron."

Just as he said this, Hanlon opened his door. "Ah, Mr. Hanlon, we must invade your room; not, of course, that we expect to find anything, but just as a form. We must obey instructions."

Hanlon bowed. "Ye'll remember the choild's sick, and just now he's sleepin'." Then he turned to another constable, and asked to be allowed to wake the other children up himself. He wished to tell them they had no cause to be afraid.

Two men went with the farmer while the other two entered his room. The bed was now only tenanted by a tiny baby, and by the bedside was a little extemporary couch made up on boxes. Over this cot Mrs. Hanlon, fully dressed, was bending, and screening with a shawl the light from the face of the sleeping child. She was a tall, big woman, with a sweet, kind, handsome, motherly face. The seekers felt sorry for her, and went quietly about the room, wherein they found nothing. Nor did they expect to find anything until they searched the sick child's bed. It was a very transparent subterfuge, the superintendent thought, and he wondered that intelligent, superior, people, like the Hanlons, had not been able to conceive anything better. But he was not surprised that Mrs. Hanlon should so clearly betray her agitation; there was that in her clear-cut, handsome face which shewed she was unused to, and by nature unfitted for, subterfuge or crooked dealing. Even as he searched their room, the man felt sorry for these people, for the determined, sad-faced man, for the grandly-built, heroic-looking woman. She had such a noble face that he felt really grieved when he had to say, "I regret, Mrs. Hanlon, that I must go through the form of searching your bed."

By this time Hanlon had returned, and she signed to him to shade the light from the child while she lifted the baby. Then the thought flashed through the policemen's minds that

perhaps there was no child to shield, or at least that it was not ill. With much hushing and cooing the mother kept the babe asleep while the bed was overhauled, and when the futile search was over, she said, as she laid it down, "It is not much that ye have been findin' after ahl your trouble," speaking quite without bitterness, and even with a slight feeling of amusement.

"I did not expect to find anything; still, I must look at this little cot, not that——"

"Ah, no, sir!" cried the mother; "me boy is sick; for manny days and nights he has not slept. Ah, it is very sick that he has been—we feared to lose 'um."

"Well, he's sleeping calmly enough now."

"He is that, sir, the Lord be praised! But ahl depends upon his sleep; never a sleep has he slept for days, and he is so sick. Ah! for the love of Heaven, sir, don't awake 'um."

She spoke in a low voice much broken by agitation. Her face was pleading—full of anxiety and fear. It was an honest, truthful face, but for a husband's sake the best of women would lie. The officer looked at Hanlon, and then he thought, "A man could not feel so deeply for a sick child," and he moved towards the couch.

Then Hanlon's pride gave way, and he also pleaded. "The choild has been havin' fever and convulsions," he said, in a low, aggrieved tone, "av ye wake 'um, the fright shall kill 'um: poor little fellow," he added tenderly, bending over the boy, "Poor little Johnny, I'm fearin' that the Lord shall be takin' ye to Himself, anyhow."

"Mr. Hanlon, it is useless talking; I must see the inside of that box."

"I swear, by all that's holy, there are no arrums in it."

"Ah, sir," cried the woman, with heartrending sorrow in her voice, "be merciful, be merciful to us, sir; 'tis the truth that Dan has told ye, there's nothing but summer clothin' in that box."

"I suppose I must move the child myself. Now, make way, Mrs. Hanlon," said the man, raising his lanthorn.

The sudden light woke the child, who, with a cry of terror, threw back his little head; the thin limbs writhed, and then became stiff and rigid. His mother took him in her arms, and neither parent paid further attention to the search, nor did they heed the answering wail which Johnny's cries evoked from the children in the other room. Till the invalid was plunged into a warm bath and beginning to breathe more freely, they seemed deaf and blind to all but his wants.

"I wish we had taken their word," murmured the constable as he finished his search; "believe me, Mrs. Hanlon, we are sorry to have been forced to do this, and I trust the little boy will be no worse."

"He cannot be that to live," said the mother quietly, and then she asked her husband to go and comfort the other children. After they were quieted he went down to see how his guests had fared. Nothing, he heard, had been found in the out-buildings. "The fools never went nigh the ricks," cried one man laughing.

"I'd be very angry with the boy that put arrums into my ricks," said Hanlon, sternly; "but for what did those fellows take me av they think I'd put arrums in beds when I'd got ricks?" By which we may conclude that had Mr. Hanlon searched a farm he would have begun with the ricks.

The farm on which this scene took place was owned by James Butler, one of the worst of landlords and the most good-natured of men. Were you in want, it would never occur to Butler to offer you a pound; but did you ask him for one he would give you a hundred, and straightway forget the whole business. His rents both in England and Ireland were notoriously high; and though his Dorset property was quite a model village—he went to Dorsetshire every autumn—he never visited his London slums, and I believe he dared not visit his estates in Ireland even had

he wished. But he did not wish. Neither the Dorset property, nor the slums, nor the bits of Irish land were of James Butler's buying. His father bought the slums as an investment, and as they brought in twelve per cent. he did well. The Dorset property was left to him, but before he inherited it he bought the scattered Irish lands, intending to found a family there. There were three bits of land—you could hardly call them estates—each managed, or mismanaged, by a bailiff, and these outlying properties were divided by a large estate. It was old Butler's ambition to buy that estate whenever it should come into the market.

But before the estate came into the market old Butler died, and James, who was a club man, and never happy for six weeks together out of London, felt much more like selling what Irish property he had than adding to it. He had never seen the land of his ancestors since he was a child, and he was resolved never to see it again. When he came into his property the life-leases of Ballymoneyboy fell in, and his bailiff Dineen counselled him not to renew them. Year by year he had raised the rent; year by year the cottiers became less able to pay; Dineen seldom sent over more than half the nominal rent, and in bad years he could get no rent at all. Then he advised his master to lay the land down in grass, and replace the cottiers by graziers of more capital. Butler acquiesced, and in this January of '68 James Butler's lands were tenantless, and the cottiers huddled together in Dan Hanlon's barn.

We declined making the acquaintance of Mr. Dineen's household on the night when he returned from Ballymoneyboy, because we felt a certain delicacy in obtruding upon the privacy of that gentleman under circumstances so trying to the temper, and we feared that were we to report in full the conversation of the worthy bailiff the polite reader might shut up this history in horror and dismay. All through the week we have waited for a moment when honest Thomas should be at once sober and good-tempered, but we have waited in vain.

Dineen has been more or less "in drink" for days, so we will take advantage of his sure absence on the eviction Monday to enter his dwelling. On that day he went out early, leaving orders to his household not to go beyond the garden gate—a warning little needed, for the weather was such that no one willingly would stir abroad. Moreover, Dineen's womankind, consisting only of his daughter and one old servant, had a dread of the treatment they might on such an occasion meet with at the hands of their neighbours.

Dineen's little daughter stood at the window, gazing at the gusty snow as it swept whirling by. Old Molly, laying the dinner things, said crossly, "Come, Deirdree, child, ye must not be fastin' because them plagues a' tenants is turned out. Never a bit a' breakfast did ye touch, and never a help have ye helped me ahl the marnin'."

"Father says they're a wicked murtherin' lot," said Deirdre, half to herself, "an' that, by rights, they should a' gone out years ago, but, oh! Molly, dear——"

"Children a' your age, Deirdree, should ate the dinners kind fathers earn for 'em and not queshun what their fathers do——"

The child came to the table, sat down. "Oh," she said, pushing her plate from her, "I can't ate. Just hark at the wind, Molly, an' the snow."

"It is the Lord sends wind an' snow, Deirdree, an' the sight av that same should make ye more thankful that He has sent ye a roof to keep the cold from ye."

"But didn't the Lord send the roofs to them cottiers, Molly? 'Tis just that I can't make out at ahl. Ye can't disremember, Molly, dear, how, Sunday week, when we went to Mass, the people hooted us, and were callin' out 'Who robbed the poor av their homes?' 'Tis in me mind an' me ears all day, Molly, that the cry av them people rings."

"They were most wicked to hoot at ye, darlin'," said the old woman, lifting the child on to her knees. "Whatever have ye to say to mashur evictin' 'em? I've no pity for such creatures."

"But, Molly, there were smahl little children an' babies. Will father send them out into the snow?"

Molly put the child off her knee. "Go," she said, "now don't be plaguin' me with queshuns; I'm busy and can't be baulked. 'Tis naught to you what father is doin'; learn yer lessons, say yer prayers, and that's ahl either heaven or earth wants a' little children."

So Deirdrè went back to her window, sorry for the cottiers and penitent at her sorrow, for Molly was clearly displeased with her. Of course the cottiers were wicked; still she could not help it, she was sorry for them. It seemed so hard to send the little babies out when the wind was cold, for that more than temporary inconvenience would be caused to the cottiers the little girl did not understand.

You would not guess to look at the little maiden that she was Dineen's daughter. Thomas was fair and snub-faced, while little Deirdrè had black hair, sweet and already rather long features, and great clear hazel eyes. She was very tall for her age, but in all else the image of her mother, who had died when her daughter was less than two years old. The beautiful Mrs. Dineen had been a ladies' maid, gentle, kindly-natured, and sentimental. When her child was born, nothing would do but that she should be named after her late mistress, Miss Deirdrè Fitzgerald, and Dineen, in the hope that the rich godmother would leave something to his little daughter, had consented to the unheard-of name. But the elder Deirdrè had married, gone to America, and forgotten her little namesake, much to Dineen's disappointment and wrath. Still, he loved his little maid in a rough way and at her mother's death refused to send her from him; so the child had led a quiet lonely life, cared for only by old Molly, whose defective housekeeping and untidy ways afforded Thomas some excuse for his preference for the "Prince of Wales," at Bally-moneyboy.

When Molly had done her work she too came to the window and looked out at the dreary prospect. The snowy garden,

and the wind-swept road had not for her the fascination they exercised over Deirdrè, but she was absolutely without news of the exciting event of the day. The bailiff's cottage was off the main road, and all day long no one had passed before it. At last, just as twilight was creeping on, a figure appeared. Molly rushed up the path with a speed surprising for her years.

"Mrs. Hickson," she called out, "Is it to Ross Farm ye have been?"

Mrs. Hickson nodded, but she did not speak.

"Come in," said Molly, "an have a cup a' tay."

Mrs. Hickson shook her head, but she stopped and said in a low voice, "It has been terr'ble work at the farm."

"I belave ye," said Molly, looking round to make sure that the child was out of earshot. "Is it there that ye've been all the day, Mrs. Hickson?"

"I have been up town; but I was dere dis marnin'. Dan Hanlon was puttin his wife and children onto a kiar; de little —" Here Mrs. Hickson stopped, "de little boy was dyin' in his mother's arrums. When I was up town I just shtopped at Mahony's to ask for 'um—he's dead. I sah Dan Hanlon just now; he's shtill at de farrum, and them poor cottiers is helpin 'um, wid the cries a' their wives and children ringin' in dere ears. Och, Molly! them children's cries shall remain wid me to me death."

"Dineen's a har-rud man," said Molly, bitterly.

"Av he's a man at ahl he's wan a' de devil's makin'," said Mrs. Hickson as she turned away.

"That's a thrue word," murmured Molly, as she shuffled back to the house, where Deirdrè was impatiently waiting for news.

"Molly!" cried the child reproachfully, "I thought ye wore never comin' at ahl. Sit down; now tell me what was Mrs. Hickson sayin'?"

"She's got the toothache agin, poor sowl! How her teeth is throublin' her."

"Ah, but about the eviction. . . What was it she was tellin' ye about the eviction, Molly?"

"The eviction?" said Molly, absently. "Ah, darlin', I'd disremembered the eviction entoirely. What should Mrs. Hickson have to say about the eviction! It was av the pains in poor Hickson's legs that she was tellin me; his legs is mortal bad; smahl thought had we for the eviction, Deirdree. Ah, ye'll be happy, dear, av ye have never annything worse than the like a' that to throuble ye. Ye don't know what worry is, I'm thinkin', Deirdree. What! have ye not set the tay? Ah, it's a mercy that poor Hickson's chest is so bad that Mrs. Hickson dared not come in for ut!"

"It was his legs ye said were bad a minute ago," said Deirdrè, setting out the cups.

"So his legs is bad, an' his chest too. The Lord forgive me!" said Molly, sharply. But it was not of hale old Hickson's imaginary sufferings that the woman was thinking, but of the homeless outcasts and the bereaved mother who had had to take her dying child out into the cold.

"'Tis late father is," said Deirdrè, presently.

"Not to say late," said Molly, reassuringly. "Manny's the time I've known 'um latur nor this."

The evening wore on; nine struck, then ten, eleven—still no Dineen. "Where will he be, I wonder," said Deirdrè, anxiously.

"It must a' been mortal cauld," said Molly, cheerfully. "I should say he's gone dhrinkin' to Ballymoneyboy." Might the Lord forgive her all the lies she had told this day, for in her heart the old woman felt that even drink would not tempt Dineen from his home after this day's work.

At midnight Molly suggested that, having gone to town, Dineen must have found the seduction of the "Prince of Wales" irresistible, and have decided to remain there till morning.

"It must be so," said the child, and wearied out she slept soundly; but Molly could not rest, and when morning came

she started for Ballymoneyboy to seek for news of the masther.

Deirdrè was left at home to warm father's slippers, keep up a fire, and make things generally cheerful; but she had done everything she could think of long before Molly came home. The old woman went first to the "Prince of Wales." But no one there had seen the bailiff. Then she went to the barracks, and learned to her grief that her master had turned homewards when the soldiers set out for Ballymoneyboy. Nothing was heard of the missing man all day. No one had seen him since he left Ross Farm. All Molly's inquiries were vain, and the cross-questioning of the police elicited no information. The peasantry, the Hanlons, the soldiers all swore they knew nothing of his whereabouts. The neighbourhood was hunted over for some trace of him, dead or living; still there were no sign, and the fate of Dineen remained a mystery.

Poor Deirdrè was at first certain that father was dead, but when his body was not discovered she became just as certain that he was alive. Not only Molly and the constables, but also Father Blake, told her that father, dreading the wrath of the peasantry, had feared to come home, and escaped to some distant country—say America—whence he would soon write and bid her join him. Father Blake thought that every day that passed without news of him rendered this more probable. As for Molly and the policemen, they did not think at all—they were certain, quite certain as if they had seen him, that "that was what father had been afther doin'. Them murtherin' cottiers had made some divil's plan which Dineen had overheard, and had thought best to get away while he could."

Perhaps neither Molly nor the constables felt quite sure of Dineen's safety when the child was not present, and the priest wondered whether it were not a mistake to erect hopes on so frail a foundation; but the child for whose peace of mind the story was invented felt neither doubt nor misgiving, and straightway forgetting what manner of man

he really was, father was built up in her mind a hero, kinder than Father Blake, handsomer than the biggest policeman, and more tenderly loving than Molly had become in these latter days. How she longed for the letter that should bid her join dear father in America. Long before a letter could arrive by any chance she tramped daily to the post-office. Those winter days of waiting sped by fast and happily. She was so busy preparing her clothes for the long journey and knitting a pair of stockings as a surprise and joy for father, who daily became less and less like the real Dineen. So January passed, and February slipped into March; still no letter came to Ballymoneyboy addressed either to Molly Healy or Deirdrè Dineen.

But all things, even waiting, come to an end, and one wet March day an end came to the expectations of Deirdrè. Molly had been to the post that morning, and had, alas! returned empty-handed. "Never mind," cried the child, "there will be wan to-morrow. I feel it in me heart that there'll be wan to-morrow."

Deirdrè had felt this assurance so often that Molly could hardly feign interest in it any more. All the wet day the child passed packing her clothes, as she had spent many another dull winter day; but the occupation was so absorbing that she was quite astonished when she saw a watery sunbeam steal in through the western window. "Sure its stopped rainin'" she said. "I'll be goin' out, and sayin' good-bye to the ould hills." So she put on her shawl and went out to say farewell, not to the hills, but to her childish happiness.

The air was soft and mild, sweet with the smell of the damp, red earth. The pale evening sky was clear and light, full of the look of spring. The birds were trying their first notes; there was no other sound, save the rolling sea beating upon the rocks. No singing bird had his heart freer from fear or care than our little maid; she had no dread of the long voyage she thought to take alone, no sorrow to leave

the beautiful land of her birth; her mind was full of the joy it would be to meet father, and she sang to herself an old song of her "Dear Irish Boy," thinking of one who in life had never been dear either to her or to anyone else.

So she walked on over the fields till she came to one that was ploughed. She climbed on to the loose, stone wall, and sat down there to rest and to look at the great dark hills behind which the sun had already passed out of sight. A yellow glow overspread the sky, and the little grey clouds became red. Deirdrè sat watching the beautiful sky, forgetting that it was time to go home. At last she felt the stones slipping from under her. She stood up ready to jump down into the grassy field behind her, but the wall gave way, and she fell full length on to the wet ploughed earth. To save herself she stretched out her arms, and her hands sank a little between the damp sods. Her right hand fell upon something that felt like another hand. What was the dreadful thing that she had grasped? Not a hand? She prayed it might not be a hand. She tore away the sods; it *was* a hand—a man's hand, changed and corrupted, a fearful sight; but yet, oh God! it was a hand. "Not father's hand; ah no, not father's hand!" The child tore wildly at the sod. She could not cry, she could not scream; like a wild beast she tore away the earth. It must not be his coat, it should not be his shirt; but it was! it was!

The pale light had left the sky; twilight crept up the valley, then darkness came. Horror and dread filled the girl's mind. To be alone—alone in the darkness with that ghastly thing. It was rising from the ground, drawing itself up from its grave, a livid face more ghastly than the changed and livid hand. Shriek after shriek rent the peaceful air till even in that lonely spot, help came at last to the daughter, wild with terror—the unhappy finder of her murdered father's body!*

For some days after this discovery, the poor little heroine

* For a historical account of this affair see A. M. Sullivan's "New Ireland."

lay weak and ill in bed. Then she got up again, and crept like a pale and silent ghost about the house, listless and forlorn. She did not speak; she ate but little; she showed no interest in what was passing around her; she asked no question touching her father's fate. When the subject was mentioned in her hearing her limbs shook as with ague, she lost all self-control, and, with her hands to her ears, rushed from the room. It was impossible to question her upon the subject, and how much she suffered in her mind none could tell. Into that abyss of horror no eye penetrated. Had she the will, she had no power to utter the thoughts that filled her mind. Her tongue was paralysed and her heart ceased beating when she tried to frame the words even in her prayers. But prayer, like all else, was an empty form just then to the little maiden. Her heart and soul were filled with one event and one great terror. All day, all night, she felt the touch of that sodden hand. Her hand was never clean from that horrible caress; the image of that thing was ever before her eyes. When her hand met that upstretched hand she had in one moment understood it all. She realised that her father had been buried alive. She had known it, but not with the hopeless certainty with which she knew it now, since she had overheard Molly say that, though several bullet wounds were found in the body, there was no room to doubt, from the position of the corpse, that the man had been buried alive, and had thrust his hand to the surface in his struggles for air.

How long had the struggle lasted? Only, in truth, a few minutes of half-conscious suffocation. But to his daughter's mind it had been a long, long agony of darkness and starvation. Every possible suffering of his was endured a hundred times by his unhappy child. Her mind dwelt upon the awful details from the moment the first shot was fired to the last struggle. But fearful as were her waking hours, she dreaded sleep—sleep with its cruel nightmare fantasies.

In her dreams she lay like her father, wounded and half

dead. Too weak to move, she saw her murderers, by the dim light of their lanterns, dig a grave. Then they seized her, and, ah! how she prayed to them to kill her outright, and save her from this awful impending fate; but despite cries and struggles and entreaties, they threw her into her living grave. Spadeful after spadeful they threw the heavy earth upon her, till sight and sound and hope all fled, and she would scream and struggle in her frenzied effort to be free, and would then awake—awake to find herself in her own bed, with Molly at her side.

But what comfort was there in being safe at home, since all she had dreamt had been really endured by her father—all that and more, for father must have dreaded to die without absolution. Heaven, no doubt, would hear her prayers for his forgiveness, but where was he now? Ah! why did not some angel tell her that his soul was at rest. And his body? Oh God, how vile! Never again could she think of him without that loathsome hand coming between her and her memory of him. As he was, so she must some day be—changed, tainted, and corrupt. From that fate there was no escape, no hope or chance of exemption. Appalled and terrified, the child would cry out in her agony, and sobbing beg Molly to strike a light. She dare not lie there in the darkness, which seemed to her a grave. Those dreary, never-ending nights, those dread eternities of darkness, were so fearful that it often seemed to Deirdre that she must be dead and be dreaming in her grave.

At length the tardy morning would bring her rest, but the days were only a little less dreadful than the nights. The light seemed always in the shadow of the darkness. There was last night to look back to, and night was hourly drawing nearer. The poor child's life was unspeakably dreary; everything around her recalled the dreadful past—Molly, her home, the too-familiar scenes, all kept her grief ever before her eyes. She dared not leave the house and look upon the fields and the now hated hills, she could not gaze at the sunset sky for

very fear. But awful as life seemed, death was a thousand times more terrible; the thought of that and of the grave was worse than all. Her misery seemed unending, and from it there was no escape.

For her future she felt no anxiety; she was too sad for that, and perhaps too young. She did not wish to leave Ballymoneyboy, nor did she fear to remain. Change of air and scene were unknown balms for sorrow in that neighbourhood, and it seemed to Deirdre that her terrors were such as she could not leave behind her; she never even wondered what would become of her, nor did she understand that now father was dead her breadwinner was gone.

So soon as Dineen's fate was known, Father Blake wrote to Mr. Butler, pointing out to that easygoing gentleman the desolate condition of his bailiff's daughter, and the landlord had written the kindest possible letter, assuring the good clergyman of his intention to provide for the little girl, but how and to what extent he did not say. The truth is, that Deirdre's fate hung for a long time in the balance.

Mr. Butler had a sister who was a nun in the very aristocratic order of Notre Dame de Bonsecours. The order is a branch of the Reformed Justinian nuns, and very popular. The community increased so rapidly that new houses were perpetually affiliated, and shortly before this time the community had bought the old abbey at Villecourt, in Normandy. Since the great Revolution the abbey had been used as a secular dwelling, but the owner, a manufacturer, failed, and the fine old place was sold at a price very moderate for such an estate, but still a heavy amount for the ladies of Bonsecours. Imagine, therefore, their distress when, after the title-deeds had been transferred, they discovered that the abbey was mortgaged to nearly its full value. They had not money enough to pay even the interest of the mortgage, and yet they resolved to free their beautiful property from its encumbrances. It is not customary for the Justinian orders to take pupils, but the Villecourt ladies resolved to open a high-class

school. The poor ladies, however, found it no easy matter to obtain pupils. Each nun wrote to all her relations and friends, setting forth at once her need and the advantages the school offered, and Madame Claire wrote of course to her brother James, begging him to send his ten-year-old daughter Rose.

Mr. Butler was not devout; moreover his wife would have called herself a Protestant, so the Butlers would not part with their little girl. The religious laxity of the Butler household made Madame Claire doubly anxious to secure little Rose, and she wrote a second time, telling her brother how essential the success of the school was, and how difficult they found it to make a start. That second letter arrived just before Father Blake's on the subject of Deirdrè Dineen, and Butler, willing to do a kindness to his sister, and anxious to be rid of further trouble in the matter of the little orphan, offered in place of Rose to send Deirdrè for ten years to the Villecourt convent.

For some time the Justinian ladies wavered. Their school was intended only for young ladies of the highest class, but the ladies of the highest class behaved after the manner of those who were bidden to a certain feast of old. Day after day the postman dropped kind excuses, softened refusals, into the post-box of the Villecourt convent. Then two pupils were promised, provided the ladies had others, not otherwise, and in despair they sent out into the highways and fetched in poor Deirdrè Dineen. So one May morning Father Blake received a letter begging him to send the little maid to Villecourt *vid* Havre, and telling him that she was to remain there till she was old enough and wise enough to earn her own bread.

Father Blake was a busy man, and overworked and harassed with the cares of his wide parish, but he took the solitary little maid himself to Cork. He was very poor, but he gave her a "Golden Manual" far handsomer than he could afford, and I believe he made it worth the while of the sea captain to be good to the little passenger; anyhow, the

honest sailor thought him "a real gentleman," and so he was, though his father was a baker in Galway town. The child cried bitterly when he left the ship—not with sorrow at parting from Father Blake, but from sheer desolation and from fear. Her sobs dwelt long in the recollection of that kind friend, but in ten minutes he was himself forgotten in the throes of sea-sickness. The journey had all been previously rehearsed by the priest—the illness, the strangeness, the fear, the landing in a foreign country; of all these things he had forewarned his little charge. None of them seemed to her so terrible as he had pictured them; she was so glad to leave the dreaded hills and lonely home at Ballymoneyboy. Even the unknown language was a relief; all was strange; it was not like Ballymoneyboy; so it happened that Deirdre wept less than the other two little pupils had wept the first night at school. The gentle nuns and the quiet convent ways soothed her weary soul, and though sad and lonely, the child felt those first months at Bonsecours as a time of peace and rest.

CHAPTER I.

To the outside world Bonsecours seemed as quiet as the grave, but to the inmates of the convent, each week, almost each day, brought fresh events. There was in that peaceful life, for all its sameness, little monotony. All the year round the garden brought its changes. The snowdrops burst above the grass, the violets flowered ; then some one found a rosebud on the southern wall. There was the flowering of the fruit-trees, the setting of the blossom, the anxiously watched ripening of a wide variety of fruits, from the first gooseberries to the latest pears. There were so many joys, so many disappointments each season in that high-walled garden, that it alone gave variety to life—variety and work ; for the flowers and fruits needed much care and labour. When the produce left the garden the labour was but begun. The snowdrops, violets, lilies, roses, and carnations of Bonsecours—aye, and the gay chrysanthemums and winter flowers—fetch a high price in the Paris market, for the flowers sold by the Justinian ladies are so well cultured, so sweet and fresh, so neatly packed and tastefully arranged, that there is a preference for them above all others. And their fresh fruits, the strawberries, grapes, and peaches, how fine they are ! The nuns, as you all know, have grown and been sponsors to divers new kinds of nectarines, pears, and apricots. At one time gooseberries and currants in abundance flowed from the same source to the Paris market, but those days are no more, for the good ladies' school has prospered, and there is now a large home consumption of fruit, both fresh and preserved.

Ten summers and nine winters have passed since little Deirdrè went to the convent—short years of many joys and of few new sorrows. The old terror is not yet dead—it sleeps, but it has awakenings. And in dear Bonsecours the girl has endured hours of secret suffering hardly less keen than the anguish of those last weeks at Ballymoneyboy. But these seasons of melancholy pass; the cloud floats from the girl's mind, and leaves her once more the placid happy Deirdrè, the right hand of the nuns, the mother of the little ones. There is a certain sadness in her lovely face, a melancholy in the glorious dark eyes, that should not be found in a young face, and least of all in so sweet and true a face as this.

Deirdrè is little Deirdrè no more, but a very tall willowy young lady of eighteen. She is no longer one of three pupils, but one of seventy; still, she has a position in the school, for she has been there longer than any other girl, and is now the only one who has been there from the beginning. The days when she could not understand her fellow-students' talk are so long gone by that they are all but forgotten; there is, perhaps, the faintest foreign accent in her French, but it is as fluent and correct as that of any of the young countesses, princesses, or baronesses amongst whom fate has cast her lot.

Had you asked any of the nuns, from the Abbess to the youngest novice, you would have heard that Deirdrè Dineen was a second St. Ursula, so full was she of virtues and of learning. No bachelor of arts at Girton has a greater name for erudition among her fellows than Miss Dineen held among her schoolmates at Bonsecours. The young lady herself had but a poor opinion of her moral worth—she knew of all her wandering thoughts at prayers, of her want of faith and trust in those times when the world was dark to her. She knew of a thousand failings—bad tempers, vanities, lazinesses, and unworthy thoughts, of unkindnesses and wants of sympathy, of which none else save her Director knew, and which even he only half believed in. She knew that her fellow-pupils thought her good and *devote*, and the knowledge grieved

her, for she felt she must be a hypocrite so to deceive them all, for she was very, very weak, and yielded so easily to every passing temptation. She knew, too, that she was vain of her learning and her mental powers—gifts and acquirements of which she had no sort of doubt. Everyone said she was clever, and, I am afraid she knew it herself. Who else could say right off the names of the kings of France and England, and the dates of their reigns, dodging, backwards or forwards, with such rapidity? Who else was so clear about the dynasties of Germany and Russia, the boundaries of the United States of America? Who else so deeply learned in ancient history and mythology, so versed in the lives of the fathers and the legends of the saints, so expert in arithmetic, so proficient on the long-enduring pianoforte?

With these accomplishments it was quite clear to Miss Dineen, as to those around her, that she was a person of considerable attainments. Yet she was not particularly fond of study. She learned her lessons thoroughly from a strict sense of duty; she remembered them because she was intelligent, and because having been for nine and a half years at the same school she had gone through the same routine a good many times. But except some book of devotion or of the lives of the saints, it never occurred to Miss Dineen to read for pleasure. Many less accomplished young ladies perfectly devoured the story books in the school library, aye, and failing anything better, even the history books. Several young persons of depraved mind even succeeded in smuggling in yellow-backed novels, which they read surreptitiously under the shadow of some lawful and ponderous tome. Such peccadilloes offered no temptation to Deirdre. When school hours were over she loved to mother the little ones, to teach them their games and soften their sorrows, or to roam in the garden with one of the numerous friends of her heart.

Every summer there came a season of prize-giving and box-packing, of bustle and farewells, and then a month of silence. No voices echoed in the passages; the cloisters and the school-

room were dumb and dead. Sometimes two or three pupils were left in the deserted dormitories, but generally the only one was the Irish orphan girl. That yearly month of holiday was longed for by her as eagerly as by any girl who was going to mother and father, brothers and home, new dresses and festivities. For during the holidays discipline was thrown aside, and Deirdrè passed her time with the kind nuns. She had for those gentle, low-voiced ladies a passionate devotion ; for some, of course, she had more love than for others, but she had an affection for every one. To be with them in the garden, to help to gather flowers and fruit, to pack and preserve them, to sew with the ladies in the embroidery-room, to help the lay-sisters in the kitchen and with the laundry-work, seemed to the Villecourt Minerva almost the summit of earthly happiness ; almost, for the absolute summit was reached on the rare days when she was allowed to help to clean and decorate the chapel.

The ladies of Villecourt had (as I suspect all school-keeping nuns have), a tendency to over-spoil and pet their pupils. These women, who had renounced the sweet joys of motherhood, found them again, and had, even on earth, some fulfilment of that promise which assures all who renounce such human happiness that it shall be restored to them a hundred-fold. The lonely little foreigner was to them a special darling : those holidays proved most endearing seasons, and the little maid came in course of time to seem a permanent institution in the house. It was impossible to think of the school without Deirdrè, and to Deirdrè it was impossible to conceive of life outside of Bonsecours. She had from time to time been into the town of Villecourt, but these expeditions seemed no more like life than does a night at the pantomime to a London-bred young lady. She enjoyed those walks just as one likes the pantomime or opera ; she was sorry when the entertainment came to an end, but she did not wish for a lifetime of secular existence any more than one wishes for a lifetime of stage singing or transformation scenes. When the time came for

her to choose her life she would elect to stay where she was, and—if the Lord willed it—become a lay-sister at Bonsecours. Of this wish she said nothing; it would be time enough when she was grown up and had to choose her life.

At last one fatal September day Deirdrè grew up—that is to say, a letter from Mr. Butler came asking the Abbess (his sister, Madame Claire, was dead), what manner of girl Dineen's daughter had grown, and whether she were not now fit to work for herself. Then Deirdrè timidly and with much fluttering of heart at her presumption, told the mother she wished to be a nun. The Abbess was an exalted and little-known personage to Deirdrè. She had been the Abbess all the time the girl had been at Bonsecours, and in the direction of that great household her time was fully occupied. She had not spoken six words to Deirdrè in as many years, and knew little of her fitness or unfitness for a religious life. She did not think it unlikely that the child might do well in some less aristocratic order, but of her special love for Bonsecours she knew nothing. It was, of course, useless to discuss the subject till she had Mr. Butler's consent, so she made inquiries of the nuns in charge of the school, and having heard from them that the girl was a miracle of goodness and of learning, she wrote to him to that effect, and added that while her attainments fitted her for an instructress of the young, her religious aspirations filled her with a desire to retire from the world, and that she only awaited his gracious permission to enter some community.

What anxious days those were in which Deirdrè waited her patron's answer. What could it matter to him? He would be sure to consent—she was certain he would consent; but for all her certainty she could neither eat nor sleep. After forty-eight endless hours it became possible to receive an answer. All through those hours she had prayed almost without ceasing that Mr. Butler would consent, but now she became too excited even to pray. Every moment she expected to be called to the Superior's room; every step she thought brought

her the dreaded, hoped-for summons. After three days of this eager waiting she could not attend in the least to her lessons; she seemed to forget everything she had ever learned.

"Deirdrè," cried Madame Angélique, "Deirdrè, behold, three times have I asked you the name of Cato's daughter!"

"Ah, pardon, madame, cried Deirdrè, starting from her dreams, "pardon, madame, I forget it."

Then the whole class giggling, murmured, "Portia."

"H-sh-sh-sh!" cried the nun, rapping the desk with her pencil; "I am addressing Deirdrè Dineen. Now, Deirdrè, recount her death."

"She killed herself," suggested the Villecourt Minerva, absently.

"But how, my girl, how?" cried the lady, losing patience.

"Ah yes, madame, how?"

For a moment the nun looked at the girl aghast. Such simple questions answered thus! What could such inattention imply? The flushed cheeks and shining eyes seemed to explain the mystery. "Deirdrè, my child," she said gently, "you are ill. What ails you, my dear, say?" But before Deirdrè could answer there was a scuffling of feet all over the room; every one rose, for the reverend mother had entered. "Sœur Angélique," said she, "can you spare me—ah—Deirdrè Dineen?"

"Certainly, my mother. Go, Deirdrè."

"Come, my child," said the Abbess, "I wish to speak to you."

Then Deirdrè knew that the die was cast. She was so agitated that she could scarcely scramble over the bench, and her curtsy to Madame Angélique was decidedly wanting in grace. Her knees shook and her eyes swam as she followed the Superior down the long corridor till they came quite to another part of the house. At length they turned into a little parlour, which was very simply but not uncomfortably furnished.

"Shut the door, dear," said the lady, as she seated

herself at her writing-table; "and now, dear, come and sit here."

Deirdrè closed the door, and went and sat down on the floor at the Abbess's feet.

"This," said the Superior slowly—"ah, now, where is it?" and she began seeking among the papers that lay on her desk. "Ah, here, yes," she went on after a few minutes. "Yes. This, my child, is the letter I have just received from your kind patron."

Deirdrè's heart beat so that it was quite audible; a grey mist hid everything from her eyes, and the muscles round her mouth quivered pitiably. Her hand, forgetful of propriety, caught tight hold of the Abbess's black serge skirt. She said nothing, partly because a lump in her throat rendered speech impossible, but also because no question had been addressed to her.

"You are aware, my dear," continued the mother soothingly, taking the girl's cold hand into her own, "you are aware that some days since I wrote to Mr. Butler. I have a copy of that letter here. No—strange! I cannot lay my hand upon it." The accused, longing for the verdict, must listen to the judge's charge with feelings similar to those which now possessed Deirdrè Dineen. "I cannot think where I put that letter. I thought it was here with the others. It is culpable carelessness on my part." ("Madame!" from Deirdrè). "But no matter; doubtless I can recall pretty well what I said."

"If it be for my pleasure, reverend mother, that you wish to recall it, I entreat of you not to take that trouble."

"You can take my word that I have not given you too bad a character," said the lady smiling.

Deirdrè bent forward and kissed the white hand that still held her own.

"Dear child! You know that your welfare, temporal and spiritual, is near our hearts. Well, briefly—for I have little time at my disposal—briefly I told Mr. Butler that though

you are well fitted to guide the young, your own wish is to embrace the religious life. I further added that the sisters, who know you well, think you well fitted for a life which, despite its seeming quietude and peace, is not without its trials; but Deirdrè—be calm, my child—Deirdrè! Hush, child! these sobs show little of the obedience to His Will which surely is the first condition of a truly religious life. There! Yes, dear child; you will be brave and patient; is it not so? I see I need not tell you, Deirdrè—dear, dear child—that for the present your patron refuses his consent. To obey him who has done so much for you is, of course, your plain duty. He thinks you are too young to make your choice for life—too young, dear, and inexperienced. Don't weep, dear child; if your vocation is true, it will outlive the few years you must pass in the world. How old are you?"

"Eighteen."

"Eighteen! Yes, that is young, and in experience you are younger than in years. To some extent I agree with Mr. Butler. To choose one must see, and as yet you have seen only one side of life. But, Deirdrè, though Mr. Butler refuses this request, he still remains your truest, staunchest friend. What do you suppose he proposes to do for you?"

"How can I tell, madame?"

"Nothing less than to take you into his own house to teach his own little girls. There, he says, you will have a home until some situation be found for you, or if you all manage to agree you may stay there altogether."

"I shall not want to stay there altogether."

"And why not, dear?"

"Ah! madame, when I'm of age I ——"

"Oh! when you are of age; that is another tale. By altogether I did not mean all your life. When you are of age you will be a religiense. I hope so, dear. Now kiss me and run away. There, be a dear brave child! And, Deirdrè, you need not return to the schoolroom this morning unless you wish."

Poor Deirdrè felt—ah! how can I say what she felt—felt as we felt in our young griefs, when sorrow appeared unending, because we had never known a heart-wound that had healed. Nearly ten years ago she had had her only sorrow, and that terror was still ever near her—at a chance word, a certain colour in the evening sky, it returned at times to her with its old overwhelming force. Sometimes the fit lasted for months, more often only days. At these times she grew pale and haggard, she became silent and depressed, and her nights were filled with ghastly fantasies and still more awful dreams. Some nameless terror kept her from confiding to anyone the memory that haunted her; to no living creature had she ever breathed a word of her sufferings or alluded to her father's fate. The nuns thought she had almost forgotten that awful story, and each time that her melancholy left her the girl thought so too, and assured herself that it was but a childish terror, which she had now outgrown. Yet when it returned she feared it would never pass away, and as she grew to womanhood and found that the dreaded memory oppressed her with undiminished force, there grew up in her mind another secret fear—the fear that at these seasons she was mad.

Time, you see, had made but a poor job of healing her childhood's sorrow. She had never really overcome her first grief, so she did not imagine she could ever get over her second until the weary years of exile had dragged out, and she would be free to return to her beloved Bonsecours.

Ah! but how could she leave it. It would tear her heart out. She did not weep as she went up to her dormitory, but her heart ached as though it must break. "I cannot bear it. I cannot bear it," she said, and then she burst into a passion of tears. After a time she remembered how wrong it was to say one could not bear things. Her fate was no worse, nay, not so bad, as that of thousands who were sent to the galleys. How could she compare her sufferings with those of men who were sent from all they loved, not for three, but for twenty years. Heaven, no doubt, saw that though

not criminal she was guilty, and had sent her that punishment of exile. Besides, what was life meant to be but a school in which souls are fitted for Paradise? How often had she prayed to have her purgatory on earth, and now she rebelled at the first little pain. How presumptuous of her to have aspired to be a nun; to aspire to that high honour one should renounce something, and she knew that in remaining at Bonsecours she would have been consulting her inclinations, and that the work of a lay-sister would be far more congenial to her than teaching.

"You are a discontented, grumbling creature. Your ingratitude to your patron disgusts me," she said to herself, and after rating herself soundly she bathed her face, and with what she thought was a cheerful countenance she went down to the schoolroom. The girls were out in the garden. Only Madame Angélique was at her desk, correcting exercises and noting down marks. She raised her eyes as Deirdrè came into the room.

"Mais, Deirdrè, que tu as l'air d'être de mauvaise humeur!"

"I am not cross, madame," said the girl, trying to smile. "Unless," she added, as she threw herself down on the bench—"unless it be against myself. No, dear madame, I am not cross, I am sad. I am going away."

"Oh! you are not going away," cried the little nun, abandoning at once her desk and her schoolmistress air. "It is not possible that you are going away. What shall I do without you? Bonsecours will not seem like home without the dear Deirdrè. You have been here longer than I." The voice of Madame Angélique broke, she began to weep; and Deirdrè's stoicism gave way too. "We shall never get on without you," sobbed the nun. "Ah! best and dearest pupil, how I shall miss you."

"I shan't feel it so hard to go if I know you are sorry, madame," said the girl tenderly.

"Sorry! That is no word for it. The light of the sun will depart with you."

"Madame," said the girl, kneeling at her friend's side, "I think—No," she said, with a sad little smile, "I will not tell you my thought."

"It is some impertinence by your face; but say on," said the nun, kissing her.

"Yes, it is a little impertinent, and you will think me ungrateful; but I dare to tell you, because you will never have the heart to be vexed with me now. Don't you think, madame, it is very cruel of you ladies to be so good to us girls? I have often thought it when I have seen the poor children go away drowned in their tears. I have—I have always been so glad to be left behind, but now I have to go! It—it breaks my heart. Madame, madame, why did you ever make me love you?"

Madame Angélique looked pityingly at the weeping girl. "Deirdre, my child, you must not grieve like that. It is not right or brave."

"No," cried the girl, suddenly jumping up. "I mean to be brave. I was trying not to cry or fret when you said I was cross, and then—you were so good—I could not help it. You don't think really, madame, that I meant you were cruel? Indeed I am not so ungrateful. But I have to be cross because—because I can't be calm any other way."

The nun kissed her. "But I must not say again that it grieves me to lose you?"

"Indeed you may," said the girl. "I would rather hear it and have to cry than not hear it."

CHAPTER II.

THE approaching departure of Deirdrè was, for some weeks, the absorbing topic at Bonsecours. She had been there so long that her leaving was almost as exciting as though one of the nuns had suddenly announced her intention of quitting the convent. A large proportion of the seventy pupils were heartbroken, and a number of the nuns afflicted, at the prospect of losing the girl, who never in her life had felt herself of so great importance or met with so much goodwill and sympathy. But the sight of a good and beautiful damsel in distress is afflicting not only to knights errant, but to all who have a tender, feeling heart; and Deirdrè's schoolfellows vied with each other in showing her love and kindness. She had always been a girl of many friends; but there were times when it had not been quite pleasant to see how much more beautiful she was than her fellows, how popular with the nuns, how clever and how good. Now all that redounded to her credit; and her peasant blood, too, how romantic and interesting. Yes, everyone conspired to break the poor child's heart with kindness.

The air was laden with mysteries. When Deirdrè came into the room there would be a general scuffle, a hiding of workbags and of work, and an expression of superhuman innocence overspread the faces of the kindly conspirators. I should be sorry to say how many workbags, needle-books, pin-cushions, shawls, aprons, nightcaps, worked handkerchiefs, and bedroom slippers Miss Dineen received the day before she left Bonsecours.

In the meantime she and the nuns were busy selecting and

preparing her modest outfit. That one little boxful of clothing caused more anxiety and discussion than many a bridal trousseau. The good nuns were terribly afraid of making her too dowdy, and a newly-married schoolfellow and inseparable friend of Deirdrè's, Céline Picard by name, was made president of their councils. Young Madame Picard had a *chic* taste, and the black-frocked nuns were also inclined to a brilliant style of dress; but Deirdrè herself was so quiet in her taste that, between them, they hit a fair and rather frumpish average.

The day for her departure was fixed in early October, and all too soon the grey autumn morning arrived whereon our heroine was banished from her Eden. Adam and Eve were at least together, and they left no friends behind them in Paradise; but our poor little Deirdrè had to bid nearly a hundred heartbreaking farewells. Even the portress, whose cruel office it was to lock the door behind her, was her beloved Sœur Cunégonde. At the railway station the last tearful adieus were uttered, and the train puffed away, leaving two nodding, handwaving lay-sisters on the platform and a heartbroken weeping young lady in the second-class compartment for "Dames Seules."

The sight of so much youth, sorrow, and loveliness touched the hearts of the girl's fellow-travellers; these strangers conspired together to cheer and comfort the mourner, and when she confided in them that she was leaving "at once home and school," and was going as a governess to strangers in a strange land, they became still more kind. They insisted on her taking a corner seat, and eating their provisions, and pointed out to her every interesting building or place they passed. There was, curiously enough, not one of these ladies who had not a friend, or at least a friend's friend, who had gone to England under very similar circumstances, and who had met with most wonderful kindness and good-fortune. Over these stories the ladies became close friends, not only with Deirdrè, but with each other; and by the time

the train reached Dieppe, everyone was talking at once, with her voice pitched so as to make herself audible above the rattling and the puffing of the train and the shrill tones of her fellow-passengers.

Deirdre was fairly bewildered—such a din from grown people she had never heard. Six shrill voices were addressing her, six pairs of eyes fixed on her tear-stained face, and she was expected to listen to six stories at once. She was subjected, too, to a brisk fire of compliment; her beauty, grace, and sweet manners were loudly praised, her blushing confusion an added charm. She felt very shy, very strange, alarmed, and headachy; but, alas! for female weakness, she was cheered by this rush of flattery.

At Dieppe her new friends did not desert her. Without them she felt sure she could never have got on board the steamer, but here she lost sight of all the friendly faces, for everyone paid for the first-class cabin; she and two very grand ladies' maids had the second to themselves. All her loneliness now came back to her, and five hours later found her a very pale, wearied, seasick maiden. How tired she was, and how confused by the difficulties of travelling alone; she never knew how it was that at length she found herself in the right train. She could not help crying, she was so miserable, so lonely, and so confused; her heart sank every moment, and she wished she might never reach London at all.

By the time the train arrived at its destination she was faint with bewilderment and fatigue. And those English! how fast they spoke, how they bustled and pushed and jostled; how the horses tramped about; how the cabmen and the porters shouted "By yer leave! by yer leave!" "Hout a the way miss; by yer leave!" What did it all mean? Where was one to get, out of the way? As for getting to Cornwall Terrace, South Kensington, that was impossible. "My box, where is she?" she asked in vain. "Not ready yet, miss; luggage over thayre." What a kissing, greeting, hustling,

bustling, happy place it was—rushing after cabs, laying hold on porters. Everyone had friends, everyone seemed delighted, except herself. And were they not demonstrative, these English! Never had she seen the like. It terrified the poor girl, and she looked so forlorn that a porter had pity on her and took her to a place of safety.

"You stand year, miss, and look out for yer box on that place."

"Ah! I see her, she is there already down on the earth."

But "she" could not be got at yet, the porter explained. Deirdre must take her stand by her trunk, and wait for the custom-house officer.

One other person seemed as bewildered as herself—a boy, about fourteen years old, who wore a high hat and an Eton jacket. He was running wildly about. "Ah! poor boy; he is seeking someone," thought Deirdre; "that is the third lady to whom he has addressed himself," and, in fact, the boy was asking a question of every shabbily-clad and lonely female he saw. There was a round little girl standing near Deirdre, and to her at length the boy came up. "Excuse me, madam, but are you not Miss Dineen?"

At the sound of her name Deirdre turned, just as the little girl indignantly repudiated the name. "My name is Dineen," she said. "Are you from Mr. Butler?"

"Oh, yes; I'm his son, don't you know; I'm awfully sorry you've been so long alone, Miss Dineen." ("No"—this to the custom-house officer—"nothing to declare.") "It's my fault; I'm so sorry. I fancied somehow that you must be small. Dineen, don't you know—the little Din."

"Een. Ah, yes; that is an idiom for small?" asked the girl, trying to be interested. "It's very amiable of you, sir, to have come to meet me. Yes, that is my only box."

"Here! Hansom—porter—on the roof, thanks! All right! 36, Cornwall Terrace."

Deirdre began to wonder whether she should ever understand the English language as spoken.

"How pale you are. I'm afraid you're awf'ly tired," continued young Butler.

"It is a long journey, and I am unused to travel; but," said the girl, with her sweet smile, "I feel so rested since I saw you—it was so strange till then. It is most good of you to have thought of that."

"I'm awf'ly glad I went. You did look bewildered, *rather*."

"So I felt. I would never have arrived at South Kensington without you. How quickly you managed everything. One minute—and it seemed so difficult."

Jimmie Butler quite forgot how angry he had felt at being sent "to meet the kids' governess;" it was really quite pleasant driving along with this lovely girl and receiving her thanks. "This is South Kensington," he said after a time.

"So soon," cried the girl in dismay.

"Yes; ain't you glad?" laughed Jim. "This is Cornwall Terrace."

How she wished the house would never come, but now, in answer to a flourish from Jim's umbrella, the cab stopped, the lad sprang out, and in a moment a door opened. "Come in, Miss Dineen," and she found herself in a strange house, feeling very blind and wretched in the dazzling brightness.

A young lady stepped out of the dining-room, very pretty, very high of heel, very tight of bodice, very fashionable. "Oh, *here* you are at last, Miss Dineen; ain't you fearfully tired? (Jim, we've quite done dinner.) Thompson shall show you to your room. Can you find your way down to the breakfast-room, and then you must have some supper, you know; or, perhaps, you'd like to have supper first?"

"Thank you;" Deirdre would prefer to take off her bonnet first, and would avail herself of mademoiselle's kind permission not to change her dress. She followed Thompson—up—up—up, a shabby man with her box on his back following them. It seemed to Deirdre that they climbed as high as heaven. The maid was very superior; she did not speak a

word till, when both she and Deirdrè were quite breathless, she flung open a door. "This is your room, miss," and then she disappeared.

There were two beds in the room, and from the larger one two little girls shyly eyed her, though pretending to be asleep. Deirdrè, too, pretended to consider them asleep; she was thankful to be able to escape their bright eyes. The inspection downstairs was quite as much as her courage would carry her through.

"Well, what is she like?" asked Mrs. Butler as her daughter re-entered the dining-room.

Rose fell into a chair and shook her chesnut head. "Oh, papa, how could you!—you silly, silly man!"

"Is she very common?" asked Mrs. Butler anxiously.

"No," said Rose, "much worse—she's a beauty. Oh, she's lovely! Keep her upstairs under lock and key, for no one will ever look at poor little *me* when she's there. 'Maud is not seventeen, but she is tall and stately;' that sort of thing, you know. Ask Jim. He looked quite beamish, though I daresay he's eating all poor mademoiselle's supper up before she has had time to get down. No, I suppose she is down, for I can hear Jim's voice in the breakfast-room; and even Jim wouldn't talk to himself, I suppose."

"Miss Dineen needn't trouble to talk. Jim will do her share too."

"Ah, well!" said the mother. "If she will relieve me of some of his perpetual flow, I will forgive her for being pretty, as I have no son over fifteen."

Master Jim was an invalid from a cricket accident, and something of a trial to his mother and sister.

Curiosity and hospitality both prompted Mrs. Butler to see the new governess this first evening. She had imagined that the beauty of the bailiff's daughter would not be of a very refined type, and the sweet gravity of the face that was turned towards her as she entered the breakfast-room greatly surprised her. She had rather disapproved of her husband's

scheme of taking the girl into their own house. The child's history revolted her, and she had never tried to overcome her prejudice, but the moment she saw the pure, true face all her dislike vanished. The girl seemed to have no thought of her beauty, no knowledge of the melancholy fascination of her face. Her manner, Mrs. Butler thought, was a little impassive, but quite simple. No sentimental blandishments proceeded from her marvellous eyes. Their clear softness made no conscious appeal; they looked up honestly and directly, and by their candour won Mrs. Butler's heart. She felt that she had never seen a face at once so truthful and so sad.

It was not always so sad, poor little face, but just then its owner's heart was so full of homesickness and desolation that, being a truthful face, it could not fail to be sad. Mrs. Butler chatted kindly to the girl about her journey, and then sent her off to bed, saying that she needed a good night's rest, and that the schoolroom breakfast was at eight.

Deirdrè thought that she had contrived to be very cheerful throughout the interview, but all the time her heart was aching for the familiar convent, for the soft-voiced nuns, and the merry pupils. They must be singing Compline now; only last night she had sung it with them. How could she live through those three long years till she should be twenty-one—ten hundred and eighty days, of which this was but one—the lifetime that had elapsed since the gates of Bonsecours closed behind her! No, she would never live through three years of it—three years in this wilderness of houses, among these strange people, in this country where everyone spoke the hated language they used to speak at Ballymoneyboy. How her head ached and her heart. The pain of it made her sick. She hardly knew what Mrs. Butler was saying. "Good night, madame." Now she was, at all events, alone.

She toiled upstairs and knelt down by her bedside, and sobbed and sobbed in her homesick loneliness. Poor solitary heart! She was so sad in this strange country, and through her desolation the old haunting horror came over her. She

dreaded the dark to-night. Well, there was one comfort, she could not put out the light, for they had burned lamps at Bonsecours, and she did not understand the gas; so she undressed by the half light and left it burning through the night. She was too overwrought and homesick and miserable to sleep. She wept and wept till the source of her tears was dry. "Ah, Madame Angélique, what would I not give for a kiss! Ah, Sainte Vierge! there is a very lonely heart asking your help to-night. Three years! How quickly they slipped by at Bonsecours. Three years! It was as long as all the ministry of our Lord. Three years are long when they are years of sorrow; but it was for her good. With grace, she would use them well. And when one day is like another, even the most unhappy days, so they say, slip by quickly. She would make her days as little monotonous as possible; there could be no harm in that, and it would help the time to go fast. Still it was a long time, three years of weary exile, and the hours of which they were made up dragged very slowly by.

She had forgotten to notice the clock striking, but next time she would be careful to count. How different was this clock to the cheerful ting-tong which the chapel clock gave four times an hour at Bonsecours. Everything, everything is different. Then came an overwhelming recollection of Ballymoneyboy. No, she would *not* think of that; she prayed in an agony of terror, and then the clock began to strike—
one—two—three—four—well, the night was passing—five—it would soon be light—six—seven—eight—oh, it was only midnight; the night would never go. She should die or go mad before morning, she could never live it through. All the old horror had come back. She was again living through her imagination of her father's terrors in his living grave. She became as cold as death, her teeth chattered and her limbs quaked so that the bedstead shook beneath her, and made a dismal rattling that she feared would wake the children. A thousand nameless terrors were upon her. Ah, she should scream—she could not bear it—yet she dared not sleep.

Sleep and dreaming were terrors to be kept at bay at all hazards. She remained awake till the first stroke of three, but before she had counted the short hour Nature had conquered, and she was asleep.

It seemed to her that she had not slept many minutes before she saw a round German face bending over her, and heard a German voice begging her to wake up. "Where am I? What has happened?" she cried in French. And then she remembered that her sorrow was not a dream; she had really left Bonsecours—left it for three years.

"You looked so tired," said the German maid, "and I tried so long to wake you that I let you lie, and here is your breakfast, mademoiselle."

Mademoiselle's head ached so that she could hardly lift it from her pillow. She was very penitent for having overslept herself, and very grateful to Theckla. There was still the aching heaviness of heart, and when she tried to eat she found there was still the lump in her throat. When Theckla left the room she burst out sobbing piteously with the aching sense of unending misery only possible to the very young.

"I can never be happy here," she said as she began dressing, "but I will try to be good and brave." She knelt down and prayed with the undoubting faith that was alike part of her nature and her training; but even thus fortified this first day was no slight ordeal to the timid girl. What should she say to the little girls, and what would they do?

The nursery was upstairs in the attics, but the schoolroom was a little den at the back of the hall—a nondescript place very common in London houses—cloak-room, pantry, waiting-room, as the need of the tenant requires, but at 36, Cornwall Terrace, schoolroom, save on dinner-party and reception nights, when it became a cloak-room. Of this room Deirdre thought with trepidation; her hands trembled so with fear that she could scarcely fasten her dress. What if the children were as shy as herself. The little new pupils at Bonsecours were

often terribly shy, while in books Master Jack and Miss Joan were always distant and overbearing to the patient governess, who tried in vain to gain their love. The girl prayed for grace to go well through this fearful interview, and then she went downstairs. How stupid she was, how idiotic of her knees to knock together and give way under her (you must remember in extenuation that she was but eighteen, and except a little bread had eaten nothing for thirty-six hours); really when she reached the door she could hardly keep from running away. The easy, treacherous lock turned round. I hope Daniel was not so frightened when he was thrust into the lions' den.

"Oh, you dear mademoiselle—you sweet *pretty* mademoiselle, you *ducky* mademoiselle, are you rested now? We saw you last night, but we wouldn't speak because you were so tired, and this morning too when we got up we saw you were asleep. Kiss us, you lovely mademoiselle; you will love us, won't you, ducky? because you are younger than Rose, and we do love you so already, and so does Jim. Now weren't we good not to come into your room? We meant to, but Jim said (we went to romp on the bed before he got up, you know), Jim made us promise to stop here."

Is mademoiselle crying as she kisses the little girls? "Oh! what is the matter, mademoiselle? Ne pleurez pas, vous savez, ne pleurez pas?"

"Ah, my dears, I cry that I am so happy—that you are so good. I was so lonely, and your sweet love, it is—it is more happiness than I can bear."

"Poor dear mademoiselle, but you'll *soon* get used to us, you know, and give over fretting for that French convent. You'll live here with us, and be our own dear mademoiselle for ever and ever."

"And when I scold for the lessons," said Deirdre smiling, "and make you speak French, will I then be your dear mademoiselle?"

"Oh, but *you* won't scold, and if you did we shouldn't

mind; you're so young. Papa says you're an infant in the eye of the law just as much as we are. And we're quite used to speaking French; we always did with Mademoiselle Le Clerc, who was *old*, and *cross*, and *horrid*, and who thought of nothing but her nasty Jules, whom she's gone to Brazil to be married to."

"Yes, but listen, mademoiselle; Emily mustn't talk all the time, must she? You'll let me have my turn, and we must speak French. Now, Emily, hush! Mademoiselle would like to hear me say, 'Doo Pigeongs' to her."

"Oh, yes," said Deirdrè in French, "I should indeed, and afterwards Emily will say something to me."

The poetry was not very perfectly remembered, and the accent— Well, what do you expect from two Anglo-Irish misses of eight and ten? By dint of much prompting the fables were got through, and then Deirdrè began a friendly conversation, in the midst of which the door opened, and Rose, fresh, fair and fashionable, came in.

"Ah, poor mademoiselle, how are you? Smothered already, I see! Down, Kate; down, Emily. You'll have to use a dog-whip to them to keep them off. Oh, whatever you may think now, in a week you *will* want to keep them off; they're terrible. What I came to say is, would you come out at half-past eleven, instead of eleven, for the children's walk you know? I want to go to the dressmaker's just across the Park, and I mayn't walk alone, but I may with you. It's an awful joke, because I'm sure you don't look much of a duenna, and I really think it's very good of me to walk at all with anyone so much handsomer than I am. I shall feel a *pig*, a stumpy, round-faced pig."

Deirdrè was fairly bewildered by this speech, which was delivered with marvellous fluency. Miss Butler, she thought, could well afford to disparage herself, since no one else was likely to do it for her. She was small and rather plump, though slight, and with charming little hands and feet. Her face was more square than round, her complexion dazzlingly

fair, her eyes blue and languishing, and her features delicately modelled, though decidedly of the *retroussé* type.

Deirdrè paid as direct homage as she dared to Miss Butler's charms, of which, to say the truth, notwithstanding her disparaging remarks, the young lady had a very just appreciation. Both Deirdrè and her pupils were ready by half-past eleven, but they waited nearly half an hour before Rose made her appearance. She looked, the convent-bred girl thought, a miracle of style.

"I'm quite ashamed of these old rags," she began, indicating her garments. "We must walk across one of the side-paths, for if we were to meet anyone I know I can't imagine what they'd think of me. Am I all right behind?" she continued, turning on her heel. "Ha! don't that sound like a guard? 'All right behind,' you know. Oh, I forgot, of course you don't know, but that's what the guard says when the train's going to start."

"Well!" said Deirdrè smiling, "your train is going to start, I suppose."

"How funny of you to have thought of saying that at once. I shouldn't have thought of it till I got across the Park; but then I never *can* think of anything clever to say at the time, I'm so quiet. I'd give worlds to have heaps to say for myself like you have. '*As you have*' I ought to say; '*like you have*' is not English at all, you know. I think, if you don't mind, we'll have both Kate and Emily between us. I shall hear what you say, don't you know, quite well. Now, Kate, do loose poor mademoiselle and come to me. Oh, yes, you must; you shall have mademoiselle coming back, and Emily shall have to put up with me. Mademoiselle, tell Kate to come. It looks *too* ridiculous, me being a head shorter than you, and if we have both the children between us people will notice it less."

Deirdrè laughed, and suggested she should walk on the horse-road, which would lessen the difference.

"Oh, no; not *here*," said Rose, quite seriously. "In the

Park, perhaps, if you don't mind. I do so hate walking with anybody tall. I feel so stumpy. I hardly ever walk with the dear old father because he makes me look so short, but I think I feel even stumpier with you, though of course you're not really so tall. But a woman always looks so much taller. Still, at this hour and in October, it doesn't really matter; but of an afternoon nothing, *nothing*, would induce me to make a merry-Andrew of myself by walking out with you. Besides, in these clothes, I could not look *very* fashionable now, could I? Don't you think it's wonderful that I wear such things at all?"

"They look to me quite new and *very* fashionable," said Deirdre, admiringly.

"Do they? Well, I am glad; not that they can be, you know, because I've had them six months, and so they must be quite antediluvian. Still, when they were new they came from a good place, so perhaps they're not quite dreadful; but, you know, I always take care to say the worst of myself that anybody could say; it's a great score off people to say something nastier of yourself than they could possibly think of."

And so the talk flowed on till Madame Tuille's was reached, and all the way home Miss Butler chattered at the same rate. To Deirdre, who was quite ignorant of fashions, it was perfectly bewildering, and she was so little used to hearing English spoken quickly that she found no little difficulty in understanding what Miss Butler said. But the kindly spirit in which the chat was conducted cheered her immensely, and the letter she wrote to Bonsecours that evening was a happier one than she would have believed it possible for her to have written from England.

True, the girl cried herself to sleep and woke homesick then and for many weeks to come, but at eighteen one cannot leave the home in which one has spent ten happy years without many a heartache and a tear, and on the whole we are most of us glad that we cannot do so.

CHAPTER III.

It would be difficult to find two girls less alike than were Rose Butler and Deirdrè Dineen, and yet in less than a week these young women were bosom friends.

They had not, probably, a single idea in common ; by nature, training, and position, they were unlike, but Rose conceived a violent affection for the governess, and Deirdrè, young, loving, and lonely, returned her love without any metaphysical reflections on the affinity, or want of it, of their souls.

Miss Butler had of course many young lady acquaintances, but she had never been to school, and the devoted friendships usual to her age and sex were unknown to her. Moreover, as a rule, she preferred the society of men. She did not care for plain women, and pretty ones presented themselves to her mind as rivals ; but Deirdrè could not be a rival ; her social inferiority prevented that. Besides, even had she been in society she was too unlike Rose to interfere in any way with that young lady's social success. For Miss Butler was a great social success. She was very pretty, very much admired, and generally allowed to be very charming. She had had the pleasant pain of refusing several perfectly eligible lovers ; but as she professed to be utterly worldly, and willing to sell herself to the highest bidder, it must be presumed that she had not as yet received an offer good enough to satisfy her ambition. And yet she could not reasonably hope ever to receive a better offer than that of Lord Kilhorse, whom she refused

last season without a moment's consideration. Yet the young lady had done her utmost to attract Kilhorse, and up to the morning that he asked her to be his wife she imagined that it was her fondest ambition to be Lady Kilhorse and the future Countess of Stablemore.

But to say the truth, Miss Butler was a sadly inconsistent person. The moral standard of a young lady who aims at a brilliant marriage cannot be said to be very high. That was Miss Butler's standard. Social success and position were the ends for which she professed to fight; and yet she fell terribly short even of these simple ambitions, for the most favoured of her suitors was a certain Alex Campbell, a guardsman of good family, but a younger son, without much prospect of wealth and with only a very moderate income. Campbell was a long-standing friend of the Butlers, and his devotion to Rose was an old story. Everyone—including the gallant lover—expected a happy ending to the affair, but he was still dangling on in suspense, and his attempts at achieving an acknowledged position as Miss Butler's *fiancé* were always unceremoniously cut short by the young lady. "Now don't, Alex, unless you want 'No' for your answer," she would say with heartless merriment, and as Alex most decidedly did *not* want "No" for his answer, he still, after two years of courtship, remained in suspense. In her heart of hearts Miss Butler disliked the idea of marriage; had it not been for the social stigma of spinsterhood she would, at twenty, have preferred remaining an old maid. Moreover, there was another reason which made her unwilling to bind herself even to so gentle a master as Alex Campbell. She cared a little—only a very little—for somebody else. She had only seen that somebody a dozen times, yet her feeling for him was strong enough to prevent her from making an engagement with any other.

This kind of sympathy no doubt had much to do with the girl's sudden friendship for Deirdre, who, before the month was out, had had a full, true, and particular account of all Rose's lovers and why she had refused them, and how Alex

was so dear and so much nicer than anyone else except—here Miss Butler would sigh very sorrowfully, but she never revealed the name of the person for whose sake she had refused a lord and kept her faithful lover in uncertainty. All she could tell dear, dearest mademoiselle, was that he was somebody whom she could *never*, NEVER marry, even supposing he should come to care for her.

Then Deirdrè would look far more melancholy than did the lovelorn maiden; it seemed so sad to think of the two lives blighted and of poor, tender, little Rose toiling through life alone. Besides, was it not a little terrible to think of a girl giving her heart to one who had never asked for it, who by some impediment could never be free to ask for it? What tragedies there were in the seeming prosperity of the world; what sorrows—perhaps what guilt! Miss Dineen never knelt down without praying for peace for her afflicted friend, and a great pity sprung up in her heart for the pretty, bright-mannered girl who, for all her apparent light-heartedness, must be so sorrowful.

Could Deirdrè have seen Rose in society much of her pity would have vanished, for the lovestricken damsel amused herself somewhat notoriously by flirtations. The fellow-feeling that should have made her wondrous kind had no place in her little heart. The thirst for conquest was upon her, and in the flush of triumph she forgot her pain, which was perhaps never so poignant as her confidant imagined.

The mysterious barrier which separated Miss Butler from the man she loved was a social one. Despite her would-be worldliness she had allowed herself to be attracted towards a penniless young novelist whose books, though they were beginning to make his name known, brought him in as yet but little money.

Rose had met this young man at many dances, and each time she saw him she found him more and more delightful. I think Mrs. Butler had some idea that he was dangerous to the peace of mind of her daughter, for she resisted all her

suggestions that he might be asked to her house, and Rose's flirtations with young Hanlon were less easily condoned than those with more eligible persons. But the young lady did not allow this affair to absorb her whole heart and mind. In the one she had space for herself, her family, Deirdrè, Alex, and half-a-score of *prétendus*; and in the other, ample room for the invention of various modes of dressmaking and other matters of equal importance. Indeed, the mind of this young lady was quite a millinery establishment, so full was it of fashions, flowers, and feathers.

These important matters formed the staple conversation between the two girls, and Deirdrè was often conscience-stricken when she remembered how much time she and Rose wasted in these frivolous chatterings, and would make spasmodic efforts to bring the conversation to a more improving level. But Miss Dineen's mental acquirements, though doubtless great, were not of a kind to be serviceable in general conversation. The rivers of Africa, the names of the wives of the Merovingian princes, even the exceptions to the rules of *quel que* and *le peu*, though necessary knowledge, are not subjects of universal interest. Rose knew nothing of the African rivers, she was hazy in the extreme about the Merovingian princesses, and if she had ever mastered the rules of *quel que* and *le peu* she had forgotten them years ago. Her general information was equally sketchy, not to say incorrect, and yet somehow she made Deirdrè feel very ignorant. She had a contempt for the school-books used at Bonsecours and laughed at her friend's attainments.

As for the young ladies whom Rose sometimes brought into the schoolroom, Deirdrè wondered whether so much knowledge could be compatible with religion. For Miss Butler, though as ignorant a young person as could be found in the three kingdoms, had friends whose pretty heads were storehouses of knowledge, and she would make these young ladies air their learning for the benefit of Deirdrè. She would set them on to discuss protection and free trade,

the *métayère* system, and the Darwinian theory, subjects of which Miss Dineen knew not even the names. Then she would ask them what Professor This had said in his last logic treatise, and about Professor That's new work on geology, till her guests wondered how Rosie Butler had suddenly come by such an intellectual awakening, and Deirdrè grew to believe that logic, jurisprudence, and political economy were among the elementary subjects taught in English schools. Poor Deirdrè! she found it very hard to accept the position of an *ignoramus*, and manfully attempted to improve her mind. Mischievous Rose got her Darwin's "*Origin of Species*" from the library; that, she said, was a simple book that any one could read; but in two days Deirdrè gave it back to her, saying that she feared she must be very stupid, for she could not understand it at all. So far as she could make out it said that the world was millions of years old, whereas everyone knew it was not six thousand years since the Creation. Then Miss Butler got her Huxley's "*Geology*," and that put an end to Miss Dineen's efforts at higher education.

Mrs. Butler had not at first approved of this intimacy between the girls. She thought that Rose might find a more suitable companion, and that Deirdrè would not be able to maintain so difficult a position as that of semi-nursery governess, and intimate friend of the daughter of the house; but as the girl continued to be quiet and unassuming, she grew to have a certain liking and respect for her. As for Rose, she was perpetually going to read French with *mademoiselle*. Mrs. Butler, when she passed the schoolroom door, often thought that Rose's reading was very animated, and that the French had an uncommonly English sound; and then she would sigh as she thought how lonely poor Rose must have been before Deirdrè's coming, with only an old woman like herself for companion. Mrs. Butler was in a chronic state of pity for those around her—poor James, poor Rose, poor *mademoiselle* and the poor servants; but when they at length came to believe in their hardships, she felt a

good deal of natural indignation at their ingratitude for all her thought for them,

For poor Rose's sake Mrs. Butler endured a vast amount of visiting. An autumn session made this particular autumn unusually gay for the time of year. Rose went out almost every afternoon and evening to some entertainment or other. Society and gaiety were, she said, an awful bore; but still this autumn session was quite providential, it gave one such a good chance of wearing out last season's dresses, which of course would be unwearable by the spring; and, for a blighted being, the young lady seemed to enjoy herself very well. The Butler's themselves gave several dinners, on which occasion Deirdrè, evicted from her schoolroom, went to bed at abnormally early hours. Rose felt heartily sorry for her friend. Of course Deirdrè was different and all that, but still it must be bitter to her to see the brightly laid-out table and the pretty dresses, and to have no part in it all. Rose would have found it unbearable. She was always scheming to find some excuse for Deirdrè to be present at one of these entertainments. "Of course you don't think you are fond of society," she would say, "because you don't know anything about it, you dear old thing. Oh, it's no use telling *me* you wouldn't like it; I shall find a chance for you." And one fine day the chance came.

The two girls were in the dining-room, putting the final touches to the flowers, when Mrs. Butler came in with a telegram. "Rose," she said, "isn't this tiresome?" and then she handed the paper to her daughter.

Deirdrè left the room as Mrs. Butler continued, "There is nothing to be done; she has put off sending so late that we can't ask anyone else to fill her place."

"We might bring down Deirdrè," said Rose, indifferently, as she went on with her flowers.

"I was just thinking of that myself; she'd be better than nobody; but has she a dress?"

"Oh, I'll see after her dress," cried good-natured Rose;

and with the help of a packet or two of pins Deirdrè's white alpaca—the pride of her heart—was made to look, “though not stylish, you know, quite presentable.”

Poor Deirdrè did not at all appreciate the pleasure Rose was so delighted at having obtained for her; she was overwhelmed with shyness, and the pink young gentleman from Oxford who fell to her share had the conversation all his own way. Her confusion was increased by the fair baldish gentleman opposite, who looked at her steadily all dinner-time. A hundred or two of Rose's pins were sticking into her, and, by the way that man stared, it was evident another packet or so had fallen out. What a relief it was when the ladies left the dining-room. But the events of the evening were, so far as Deirdrè was concerned, only just beginning, for, instead of sending her to bed, as she had expected when the ladies retired to the drawing-room, Mrs. Butler asked her to sing. She had a sweet voice, had been well-taught, and, being the only person of musical acquirements present, was, in due time, requested to sing again. Before the song was finished, the tall, baldish man came up alone from the dining-room, and seating himself near Mrs. Butler, asked her, in a low tone, who was the girl at the piano, and if he might beg an introduction.

“She is our governess, Miss Dineen,” replied the lady.

“All the same, I should like an introduction.”

“She ought to be going to bed. She cannot sleep till ten in the morning, as you do, Mr. Bellingham. Our nursery breakfast is at eight, and she gets up early to go to mass first.”

“Forgive my importunity, it will be a true kindness to introduce me.”

The song was over by this time, and Deirdrè had retired to a dark corner of the room to explain photographs to a very dull lady.

“Miss Dineen,” said Mrs. Butler, “may I introduce Mr. Bellingham to you? Mr. Bellingham, Miss Dineen.”

Deirdrè turned as red as a pomegranate flower. She was at a loss to understand this formality, for Mrs. Butler, like the children, always addressed her as "Mademoiselle." Bellingham thought she looked prettier than ever.

Her song was a good opening for conversation. Was she not French? No English lady that he had ever heard could sing French like that; and so Bellingham learned that she had been brought up by the ladies of Bonsecours, at Villecourt. He also, he told her, had lived much in France. He had studied painting for many years in Paris; "but that," he added, "is long ago, before you can have been old enough to leave England."

Deirdrè went rather white; for a moment she was silent; then, with evident embarrassment, she said—

"I am Irish."

Bellingham saw that the subject did not please, and chatted about other things: he made himself most charming, and Deirdrè was pleased, as a young girl must be, by the attention of a man so much older than herself.

Mrs. Butler watched the scene with displeasure. It was not that she wished her own daughter to absorb every man's attention, but she thought it unjust of a man of the world like Bellingham to be so *empressé* in his manner towards a young and inexperienced girl like Deirdrè, and she took the first opportunity of sending the girl upstairs to bed.

"Why did you spoil my evening?" asked Bellingham, who was intimate at the house, and privileged to make rude remarks.

"For the peace of mind of my pretty governess."

"Pretty! she's the most magnificent creature I have ever seen."

"Then my magnificent governess. But I hope you did not tell her that you think her magnificent."

"No, not in so many words; but of course she knows it." Then after a pause he added, "Who is she, Mrs. Butler?"

"Our governess," replied the lady, smiling.

"Yes, I know that, but——"

"You think there is a mystery about her? I don't suppose she would like it to be talked of, poor child, though it is really no mystery at all. She is the daughter of a bailiff of my husband's who was murdered in a most horrible manner."

"I remember; that happened soon after I knew you. There was something ghastly about it, I forget what. She found her father's body, did she not?"

"Yes, poor child. We sent her to a school at Villecourt, where James's sister was, and now she wishes to be a nun. James won't consent till she is twenty-one, but I think it would be the best thing that could happen to her."

"Heaven forbid!"

"Ah! that is so like a man," said the lady as she turned away.

CHAPTER IV.

EVERYONE with the slightest pretensions to art knowledge is acquainted with the paintings of Arthur Bellingham. They are not very æsthetic or pre-Raphaelite, nor are they products of the highest genius, but they are good, sound, marketable works of art, and they brought to their creator much renown and a very considerable income. At the time we are writing of (the latter half of the seventies) you could not go to an Academy exhibition without seeing three portraits and a subject picture by Arthur Bellingham, A.R.A., and though he did not belong to "that school," two or three of his paintings added a brighter lustre to the crimson walls of the Grosvenor Gallery. Nor was his fame restricted to England, for his two best pictures from one year's Academy always appeared in the next season's Salon. It was a condition he made in the sale of his favourite pictures, for he was proud of his Continental reputation. But though his subject pictures were popular, our artist's reputation was greatest as a portrait painter; his likenesses were striking, his drawing good, his painting flashy and *chic*—the sort of painting one praises as being "so French." It looked very well in the Academy. I am not sure that it looked quite so well in the Salon, where there were a great many pictures better executed in the same style.

There were ill-natured critics who said that Bellingham's art would not live, that his works would be scorned by succeeding generations, and that their qualities were such as would only be admired at a time when that particular style of painting was in vogue. Bellingham himself inclined to that

opinion; but the verdict of posterity troubled him little, and he was very well satisfied with his success, his notoriety, his big income, and his good position. But his youth was over; he was past forty, and it did sometimes occur to him that his artistic house in Kensington was lonely, and that he was old enough for some more domestic kind of happiness than the joys of dancing, dining out, or even the pleasures of the club, though he was a great club man and fond of his club. He had, moreover, memories of a more idyllic life; for long, long ago, when his hair had been blonde and plentiful, when his paintings had been neither admirable nor admired, and when his income was little more than his patrimony, Bellingham had married. That was after he left Paris, and when he had gone for a year's travel in Italy. The year spun itself out into two, and when he returned to London he brought with him his wife, a beautiful peasant girl who had sat for him in Capri. Mrs. Bellingham was short and square—well, perhaps stumpy—but she had the most beautiful mournful eyes, the most tender endearing smile in the world, and Bellingham had been madly in love with her. But after she was his wife, and he returned to London, he got used to the eyes, and the smile became less attractive than the congenial society of the men at the Constable Club, or the dinners at my Lady Dashwood's or the Countess Vere de Vere's.

To these houses Mrs. Bellingham, having been a model, was of course not invited, and the poor young thing sat alone through the long dull evenings. Bellingham's male friends criticised his conduct pretty severely. It was, they said, shameful of him to leave his wife so much alone, or to go to houses into which his wife, who was as pure as an angel, was not asked. But the husband himself thought differently; he could not afford to refuse influential invitations, and he might hear of work (how no one knows) from the fellows at the club. So the husband amused himself from a sense of duty, and the wife sat at home in silence, for she was far too stupid to learn to speak any other language than her

native Italian *patois*. The young creature never complained; no matter how much her husband left her, she always managed to welcome him with a smile; but the smile grew more and more wistful, and the sad eyes became sadder, and the healthy bronze faded from the olive cheeks. The poor girl fretted and mourned in her dingy Siberia, and thus at last quite quietly she died.

All Bellingham's love came back when it was too late; his heart was stung with sorrow and remorse, and he thought he could never be a happy man again. He hated London, he could not face his friends, so he went to America to sketch for a magazine, and he stayed there two years. When he returned he was cured of his sorrow and had made for himself a considerable reputation. That was now thirteen years ago, and Bellingham's marriage was forgotten by his friends, almost forgotten by himself; but sometimes in the midst of his work, in the midst of his pleasures, the memory of the woman who had loved him would come back.

Then, till the mood passed, there would be no more work, no more enjoyment. What happy days those had been at Capri. Ah me! after all, nothing the world could give was so precious as a good woman's love. No pleasure was like the happiness of home. Once or twice he had thought of a second marriage, but he had never seen any face so dear to him as was the sketch of Andreina that hung above his bed, never until this night when fate had thrown in his path the beautiful Deirdrè Dineen.

Now he had once more seen Andreina's eyes and the smile of his dead wife. In Deirdrè Andreina lived again, purified and exalted as the dead will rise at the Resurrection. He thought all this as he walked home from Cornwall Terrace. It may be that it was his artist nature that enabled him to fall in love so late in life as forty; but be that as it may, his heart, which had offered incense at many shrines, was now consumed by as hot a flame as that with which it had burned for Andreina sixteen years ago.

Bellingham had never denied himself any attainable enjoyment. So far as he had been able he had all his life done precisely as he wished. He had known first-rate people because it pleased him to know the best people. He had known Bohemians because their society was congenial to him; he had painted ugly people when he had a whim for making money; he had refused good commissions when he had set his heart on finishing the work he had in hand or on a holiday. He had painted because he liked painting and the money and position he could not have had without it, but he never let his work interfere with his dancing, or his shooting, or any of the enjoyments that he really loved. Prudence had ruled his life far less than inclination; so he stilled the voice within him that whispered of disparity of years, of aim, of education, and of social status, and he resolved that at all hazards he would marry Deirdre Dineen.

Dear little woman! how those glorious eyes would brighten up his home. What shape, what colour, what simple truthfulness of expression! And then that smile; it was Andreina's smile, it was an angel's smile! She was far more beautiful than Andreina had been; her long grave features were so delicately modelled, her graceful head was so exquisitely poised. Her figure, too, was tall and lissome; and how fine were the coils of her plentiful black hair! Not one of the beauties of the day could compare with her, and yet she looked so simple and so good. For the first time the sketch of Andreina seemed rough and coarse. He brought a light to it and looked at it long and earnestly. He wondered how he had ever thought it beautiful. He would call on Mrs. Butler the very next day and tell her of his intentions.

When Bellingham woke in the morning his mind was still filled with the image of Deirdre Dineen. It was useless to go to the Butlers' before five, for they always went out in the early part of the afternoon, and it seemed as though the time would never pass. He could not work, he could not settle to anything; he spent all the morning making pencil

sketches of his recollections of Deirdre. At half-past four he went out, but when he arrived at Cornwall Terrace he found that the ladies had not come in. He left word that he would call again later, and made another visit in the neighbourhood.

In the meantime Mrs. Butler returned and was greatly surprised at the message Bellingham had left. What could have happened of sufficient importance to bring him twice in one afternoon? Mrs. Butler imagined all sorts of things, but nothing explained it satisfactorily. Rose had not returned with her mother, much to Bellingham's relief.

"I am so glad to find you alone," he said, as he shook hands.

"Then I suppose you have some news to tell me," said Mrs. Butler. Certainly he was going to be married. "What can it be?"

"It's not exactly news, Mrs. Butler, and I'm afraid you will think me mad, but er—er—the—er truth is——"

"You are going to be married!"

"Whatever made you guess that?" said Bellingham, rather crossly. Perhaps he was not quite pleased that she should guess it on the top of his remark about seeming mad. "It is not quite—that is to say, not exactly—in fact I don't know that I'm going to be married at all." Really it was a very embarrassing situation; he had had no idea he could feel so foolish; "but," he continued, walking towards a picture and looking at it intently, "I—I came, in short, to tell you I should like to marry Miss Dineen."

"Miss Dineen! You can't mean it; why, you only saw her last night."

"Yes, of course," he said, walking about and examining first one thing and then another; "I know how young she is, and how beautiful and all that, and that I am, as people say, old enough to be her father, and that if she takes me she will have me, not for myself but for my home. But the fact is I had rather she took me for that than that she would not have me at all."

"No, no," cried Mrs. Butler, distressed by this humility. "I was thinking nothing of the kind. Indeed, I don't mind saying that I think she will be a very lucky girl. It was of you I was thinking. Would you not be happier with some woman nearer your own age, more in your own set, more of your own class? Of course she is a very pretty girl, but does that make up for everything? She has not a farthing; she is not a lady."

Bellingham shook his head. "My first wife was not a lady, and I loved her more than any woman I had ever seen until last night. I know," he added sadly, "that I did not value her as I ought, but I am wiser now. I should be a better husband than many a younger man who does not know what love and happiness are worth."

Mrs. Butler was deeply touched. She had known this man twelve years, but never before had she heard him allude to his dead wife; very seldom had she seen him serious at all. But now she felt, this is the true man; his worldiness, his frivolity, his love of society, are the mask with which he shrouds a tender heart, too deeply wounded to bear the light of day. She laid her hand on his. "What can I do to help you?" she said softly. "Of course I will give you opportunities for seeing the girl, but what more can I do?"

"Nothing but keep my secret for the present, and many thanks, dear friend, for your help and sympathy. Good-bye. No, thank you. I will not see her to-day, I think."

Bellingham had always been a frequent visitor at the Butlers', but now he dropped in to tea with persistent regularity, always remaining throughout the children's hour to see Kate and Emily, for whom he had conceived a wonderful affection. Rose suspected that Deirdre was the attraction, and that her mother was in Arthur's confidence, for before the night of that eventful dinner mademoiselle had never accompanied her pupils into the drawing-room. Up to that time Mrs. Butler had always liked to have her little girls to herself for one hour in the day, and had thought too that their

governess would be glad of this hour of quietness and rest; but now she considered the schoolroom dull for the young girl, and said that since she and Rose were such desperate friends, she had better come with the children into the drawing-room.

Those winter afternoons were very pleasant in the Butlers' cosy drawing-room when the damp and fog were shut out, the curtains drawn, and the room bright with the mingled light of fire and gas. Sometimes Bellingham scarcely spoke a word to the girl of his heart, who was quiet and bashful. But each time he saw her he thought her more lovely and more lovable than before. Indeed, she was a charming figure at these times, with her pupils clinging to her and offering her the sweet homage of children's love. Every word she spoke, either to them or him, revealed, he thought, a mind as rarely beautiful as her face. Had she loved dress and money and pleasure, he might, perhaps, have held that disposition to be as sweet and feminine as he now thought her love of Rose and of the children, her religious tendency, her candid simplicity, and her wish to retire from the world. I fear it was her eyes he was in love with, and that he would have loved any soul that looked out of them, any mind that went with that sweet serious face.

When Christmas came, Bellingham said he must give Kate and Emily a treat, and proposed to take them to the pantomime. He was sure he could not keep them in order without Miss Dineen, so it was arranged that she and Rose, and Jim and Mrs. Butler, should go too. Had it really been the girl's saintly gravity he was in love with, her laughter and merriment would have given his passion a terrible shock. How absorbed she was by the absurd play, how infinitely more interested than either of the children, who had been to the pantomime half-a-dozen times before. When the ballet opened Arthur trembled, but it did not shock her in the least, and the beauty of the transformation scene brought tears of emotion to her eyes. All the stage effects she found enchanting,

all such jokes as she could understand were new and good; the clown and pantaloons were to her extremely witty. She was far more enjoyable than the play, so at least all the grown-up ones agreed.

"Is she not lovely when she laughs?" Bellingham whispered sentimentally to Rose.

Rose could not quite sympathise with him in this. "She is always lovely," she said kindly, but she really thought Deirdre shut up her eyes too much when she laughed, and had often told her so. "You should practise smiling so as to keep your eyes open. I used to wrinkle up mine just as you do, so I know you can get out of it if you try," was a warning which Rose had more than once bestowed upon her friend, but how vainly! There was Deirdre ruining her chances by laughing in the most unbecoming manner, wrinkling up her eyes till they quite disappeared.

"I have never seen her in this charming mood before," again whispered Bellingham to sympathetic Rose. "Is she often like this?"

Rose was now quite sure that Arthur was in love. She had heard him affirm that the charm of Deirdre's face was its unconscious look of doom, of predestination to unutterable woe, and yet here he was admiring the girl because she was dying of laughter.

"Yes," she replied, "she is full of fun when you know her; at least, at times she is. She is very *journalière*, don't you know."

That treat went off so well that Bellingham was encouraged to give a children's party, consisting of his sister's children and Kate and Emily. His sister, Mrs. Stanley, brought her own children, and Deirdre escorted the Butler girls. That introduction of Miss Dineen to his sister was of course the reason of the little entertainment, only neither of the ladies knew it. Then in return the Butler children invited him to their Christmas-tree, so that with one thing and another he saw a good deal of Miss Dineen during the holiday. But that

sort of thing could not go on for ever. He never got beyond a certain point of intimacy with the girl, who, little dreaming he intended to marry her, became icy the moment he made sweet speeches to her, though she was quite simple and friendly on other occasions. So one evening soon after the holidays were over he resolved to take the fateful step. He chose a time when he knew all the Butlers would be out at a dance, and then he called and asked for Mrs. Butler.

"Hall the family his hout, sir," announced John.

Then Bellingham said he would like to leave a message with Miss Dineen, and was accordingly shown into the breakfast-room; and before he had time to recal the speech he had so carefully prepared the girl came in to him.

"I'm sorry," she said, "that Mrs. Butler is out."

"Yes," said Bellingham, "I must ask you to excuse me for disturbing you; but—I—I wish particularly to speak to you, Miss Dineen. Mrs. Butler knows what I am going to say."

Deirdrè bowed. She looked surprised, for she wondered what he could have to tell her; but no suspicion of the cause of this visit crossed her mind, and her evident unconsciousness added not a little to his embarrassment. Moreover, she neither sat down herself nor asked him to be seated. She expected to receive a message, nothing more.

"Miss Dineen," began Bellingham, and then he paused. Somehow all the graceful things he had meant to say went out of his mind. "Miss Dineen, I am come to ask a great favour of you. I have come to beg you to be my wife. Oh, don't look so distressed, don't answer me now—take time for it. I know I am old, or at least I must seem so to you, but I am not too old to love you more than all else in the world. I don't ask you to love me yet, only say that you will marry me, and in time—in time I hope I shall win your love."

Deirdrè stood perfectly still; all the colour had left her face, even her lips were as white as marble.

"Oh," she said with a little sob, "you are very good, and, believe me, I am grateful." Then she sank down in a chair,

and for a moment she did not speak. It was so unexpected that she felt quite stunned. How good he must be to care for a poor forlorn creature like herself. She never doubted for an instant that pity was the motive of his offer. He had, she thought, passed the age of loving, and seeing the homeless, friendless girl had, with rare generosity, resolved to offer her a home. It was impossible that he could really love so dull and unattractive a person as herself.

"You are very good," she said, looking at him with great tearful eyes; "but I have never thought of marriage or of love for myself." Then something in the man's face showed her that he really loved her. "Oh, sir," she cried, "do not look like that, I am not worth loving in that way. No, it is not the age. No," in answer to another question, "there is no one else—how could there be? I do not think of marriage, it is that I wish to be a nun."

Such a thing, Arthur insisted, was not to be thought of. He would, he declared, rather a thousand times hear of her marrying another man than of her taking the veil. To do that would be the most selfish thing possible. How could she think by seeking out a path for herself to follow the Divine will, when here was a duty straight before her? Here was a soul to win if she chose to win it. Her influence would be great enough to keep him in the narrow way. He would not hide anything from her. He had loved before; he had been married—married to a woman as young and far more inexperienced than herself. "She was only a peasant girl," he added, "yet the year I passed under her influence was the only one of my life I should not change had I my time over again. But she died, and since her death I cared for no one till I saw you. All she was you can be to me and more—far more."

For the moment the man was quite sincere, and indeed the girl looked as good and as lovely as the angel he assured her that she could be to him. The appeal was of all others the one most calculated to move her, to flatter her. Still she was

not convinced; her heart told her that in the shelter of a religious house alone could her wounded nature find peace and rest.

"I think," she said with a great effort, "I think you do not know my history."

"I have long known it," he replied gently; "I love and honour you the more for that sorrow, but it is passed; you have had your share of grief, as I trust I have had mine."

"Yes, it is passed, as having a limb cut off might be passed; but one is maimed for life. Oh, you do not understand how that darkens my whole life. I am now telling you a thing which I have told as yet to no one, never in my life." Her face was drawn and blanched, her heart stopped and her eyes dilated. "I can't say it," and then she began to tremble all over—her lips refused to move. At last, by a great effort, she went on. "Sometimes all the horror of that hour when I—I found my father comes back so strongly that I think I must be mad." The effort was over now, and she went on quickly and nervously. "Sometimes I wish I were mad and had done with it. Now you must see, sir, that I should not marry. That is my chief reason. Suppose I had not told you and had married you, I should always have felt I had cheated you. And now you will not wish to marry a girl who may, perhaps—who is, perhaps, already mad."

The girl's difficulty in approaching the subject, the pain it evidently caused her to mention it, had prepared Bellingham for something so different to this innocent confession that when it was over he could hardly restrain a smile. Her fears, he assured her, were groundless; her depression was the inevitable effect of a fright in childhood; "but," he continued, "as you get older, as your life becomes fuller, it will cease to haunt you. You need fear nothing; its pain is the only thing to dread from it. For a fancy like that surely you will not sacrifice your life and mine?"

"I think I have a vocation. I dare not disobey the voice of God."

Then Bellingham went over the old ground, and pleaded his reclaimable sinfulness with renewed eloquence, and in the end he went away hopeful, though without an answer. He was to leave the girl the morrow to think it over, and the day after he was to come for his reply.

The morrow passed. Bellingham's hour came, yet the girl was no nearer a decision. Mrs. Butler had represented to her how fortunate she was in that she, poor, solitary, and plebeian, had gained the love of this well-born, well-to-do gentleman. Deirdre agreed. She was all gratitude; still her conscience forbade her to accept him, and her conscience was seconded by her heart.

"I don't think I feel as one should do to a husband. I honour him, I am grateful to him, but I do not love him."

"That would come in time." (So Mr. Bellingham had said.) Well, Mrs. Butler thought he was right—a girl should not love before her heart had been asked for. She respected him?

"Oh, yes."

"And you like him?"

"Very much."

"Then why can you not marry him?"

With Rose she fared no better than with Mrs. Butler. Rose, too, thought she would be sure to love him in time; thought she had scored heavy points in making a man love her whom heaps of girls had tried to catch. Rose did not think him a bit too old; she thought him everything that could be wished, though she herself would not have accepted him because he was too fair. She had already explained to Deirdre that she would never marry a man with light hair; otherwise she should have taken Alex long ago.

On the whole, Miss Dineen found the advice of her friends of little service to her, and when Bellingham came for his answer he found he must take No, or go without one. The poor girl was really unhappy; she felt that she was in disgrace. Mr. Butler was quite indignant at her hesitation—

she was, he told his wife, a vain young madam, who expected to bring all the world to her feet because she had a pretty face. Mrs. Butler was more just, but she, and even Rose, became distant and chilly in manner. The girl really would not have had the courage to say No, definitely, even had she been sure which way her duty and her inclination lay, but after all the arguments that had been weighted down on her she hardly knew whether she wished to say Yes or No.

At last she asked leave to go for a week to Bonsecours, to think the matter over quietly and to consult her old friends. So Mrs. Butler wrote to the Superior, explaining the case and the eligibility of the offer, and what a model and desirable husband Mr. Bellingham would make for any girl. Deirdrè's circumstances, her low birth and good education, her penniless condition and her absolutely solitary state, inclined the Abbess to think that a happy and respectable marriage would be, unless the girl had a strong vocation for the religious life, the very best thing that could befall her; and from the tone of the Superior's answer Mrs. Butler did not think she would exercise any undue influence over the girl. So, after a little consultation with her husband and Rose, she decided to allow Deirdrè to return for a time to her beloved home.

CHAPTER V.

It was night when Deirdrè reached Villecourt, and dark when the town omnibus set her down ten minutes' walk from the convent. She was so happy to be back that she quite forgot that she was very tired; her heart felt as light as air, and at this return all her perplexities vanished. She was quite sure now that she did not wish to marry Mr. Bellingham or anyone else; all her desire was for the thirty-two months to run by that must elapse before she could come back for ever—but in the meantime Heaven had been very good to her to send her such kind friends during her years of exile. She felt a little remorseful when she remembered how great had been the influence of these friends, that it had proved almost strong enough to blind her to her vocation. She wondered now how she could possibly have hesitated a moment before saying "No" to Mr. Bellingham's proposal. Nevertheless, she was glad he had made the offer, since without it she would not now have been toiling up the muddy hill to Bonsecours—she would not have had this happy, happy home-coming.

How glad she would be to see the dear loved ladies once again; and they—they too would be pleased to see their little Deirdrè. Of course she knew she was nothing to them compared to what they were to her. Still, they would be pleased to see her, and she, she would have walked the whole way from Dieppe barefooted to spend a single day with them. She was far too happy to heed the rain or the darkness as she walked along the road she had so often traversed on feast days when, with the other girls, she had enjoyed the treat of a walk outside the walls. How sorry they used to be to come to that

corner of the garden wall that was now so welcome. The ivy now reached to the top of it and she could remember when it was planted.

By this time she had reached the gate. Never before had she pulled the old bell-handle, that ceremony having always been performed by one of the lay sisters who marshalled the little regiment. She smiled as she grasped the handle, and thought how often it had been her childish ambition to make the bell give a good soul-stirring clang, as strangers did sometimes when they came to see the chapel; but the single 'ting' that she now called forth was as meek as the ringing of the lay sisters used to be. She had never before pulled the bell, but the rattle of the locks and bolts was sweetly familiar to her.

"Ah, Sœur Cunégonde," she cried, throwing her arms round the portress, "what a joy to return!" Sœur Cunégonde gave her a decorous kiss, and then put her finger on her mouth. Deirdre had forgotten that it was silence time.

The portress led the way down a wing of the convent into which Deirdre had seldom penetrated. The pupils had the left wing and were forbidden to enter the right, where the visitors were lodged, there being also a small penitentiary in that part of the convent. It didn't seem at all like the old home, this strange right wing. Sœur Cunégonde trotted along the corridors at a great rate, and made a sign as she passed a certain door, signifying that that was the visitors' parlour. Deirdre had been aware of the fact for ten years; somehow it hurt her to be treated thus, like a stranger. The sister then led the way upstairs, down a passage with a number of doors on either side; one of these she opened, and Deirdre followed her into the little cell. How sweet and clean and homelike it looked, with its narrow bed, its prayer-table, and its whitewashed walls!

Deirdre caught hold of the good woman and kissed her, and then began to cry. The sister returned her embrace warmly, and whispered sympathy for the girl's fatigue, and assured her

that she would be better when she had eaten. Then she left her with an admonition to be quick, as Compline was over, and in twenty minutes the bell would ring for Matins. All the conversation was conducted in a sepulchral whisper, so as to obey the letter if not the spirit of the rule which enforced silence after Compline had been sung.

Deirdrè pulled off her bonnet and jacket. There was a cap of checked muslin with hideous green strings lying on the bed. How strange it seemed to put on that symbol of guesthood. She tied the strings, and then, without consulting the tiny mirror above the washstand as to the effect, she ran downstairs to the visitors' room. Three middle-aged spinsters, wearing black dresses and caps like her own, were in the room, and there was also a mild old nun, Madame Christine, whose working days were over, and who was now in charge of the guest-parlour.

Deirdrè knew the old lady well; she had often wheeled her chair round the garden on sunny days. But Madame Christine's eyes were dim and her memory failing. She did not recognise the lady in the visitor's cap as the little Irish pupil, and though she smiled in response to the girl's cry of delight and embraces, it was clear that she had no idea who was the tall visitor who seemed so pleased to see her. But she did her best, dear old hypocrite, to pretend to know her, and having signed to Deirdrè to take the steaming basin of soup that was standing on the table, she went on smiling and nodding in a reassuring manner. Deirdrè finished her supper and then rose to go to the chapel. One of the visitors followed her and caught hold of her in the corridor.

"My dear," whispered this stranger, "can you not push your hair more under your cap? It looks so unfitted to a religious house, all waving about like that."

Deirdrè looked at her rather indignantly.

"You must not take what I say in bad part," continued the lady; "I have been here three months; I am quite one of the house."

"And I, mademoiselle," said she of the rebellious hair, smiling, "I have lived here ten years. Good evening, mademoiselle," and she walked off to the chapel rather defiantly.

How unlike the old days it was. Everything seemed changed, but no doubt that was merely because she was so tired. To-morrow she would feel otherwise; she wished she had been less rude to that lady. She slept well and woke early, and before it was light she was dressed and ready to go to the chapel. A lay sister was scouring the passages as she went down them; another was in the visitors' room, cleaning the stove. That would be the sort of thing she should do when she came back—all her life, all her life. Now that she had seen more of the world she would have preferred to be a choir nun. How odd it was that even in the kingdom of God money and position made so much difference. Had the apostles entered the Order of Bonsecours, all, except perhaps St. Thomas, would have had to be lay brothers. How worldly she was to think such thoughts as that; how wrong to question the wisdom and justice of her superiors. She had chosen to be an abject in the house of her God rather than to dwell in the tabernacles of sinners. Besides, those ladies of the choir had something to give up when a voice said, "Forsake all and follow me." And she—she knew very well she would sooner be a lay sister at Bonsecours than a princess in London.

The Superior was too busy to see her that day, so she spent most of her time in the chapel. Madame Angélique came across from the school to visit her old pupil, and invited her to go back for an hour to see her schoolfellows, but the girl felt too agitated to care to do this until her fate was quite decided. She had not long to wait in suspense, for next morning, soon after Tierce, the Superior sent for her. She obeyed the summons very gladly, and ran down the cloisters with a light heart. At length she could tell all her scruples, all her hopes and aspirations, and feel sure they would meet with compre-

hension and sympathy. Her hand trembled a little from excitement as she opened the door and raised the hand that was extended to her to her lips.

"Ah, my child, it is pleasant to have you among us and to see you looking so well and so happy. Your new friends are good to you?"

"Oh yes, reverend mother, they are most good, most kind," said the girl, seating herself at the lady's feet; "but it is because of my returning here that I look so happy."

"Then you are not happy in London?"

"Indeed, yes. Of course, reverend mother, it is not the same thing as being here, but I am very happy there. How can I be grateful enough that Heaven has always placed me with friends so good and so kind?"

"Yes, dear child, you are right to ascribe all to Heaven. Heaven, also, you must thank for sending you the love of this Monsieur—this, ah—this Monsieur—eh?"

"Bellingham?" suggested Deirdre, with a shade of disappointment in her voice.

"Yes, this Monsieur Bellingham—that is it. Few girls in your position—without fortune, without connections—have offers so advantageous as, from what I hear, this one must be."

Deirdre did not speak; so, after a pause, the lady continued, "Madame Butler writes to me that he is all a young girl's husband should be, and also most accomplished—most agreeable."

"Yes, he is very agreeable."

"But, for some reason, he does not please you."

"Ah, my mother! I don't wish to marry. Five months in London have not taught me to forget the ten years I have spent under this roof. I want to come back—to live here, to die here, to lie in the little cemetery till the last day."

"My dear, dear child," murmured the Mother, pressing the hand that lay in her lap—"my dear, dear child, would that it could be so."

"And why can it not, dear mother?" cried the girl, eagerly.

She had risen from a sitting to a kneeling posture; her face was pleading, her eyes were wonderfully eloquent. "I am young. I can wait. Mr. Butler will not require a governess for ever. In five, four years, the little girls will be beyond me. He will not need me any more, and then why can I not come back here?"

"My dear," said the lady—she was a countess in her own right—"my dear," she said with a gentle smile, laying her hand lovingly on the muslin cap, "you are a dear, good child, a sweet flower in God's garden; but, dear child, you are not of our class, and, moreover, we are too poor to receive even a princess without *dot*."

"Oh! I am not so uplifted," cried the girl, hurt that she should have seemed capable of such presumption. "I wish for nothing more than to be a lay sister, and to serve all you ladies. Ah, reverend mother! Sister Hortense will tell you I can sew, and they will tell you in the laundry how well I can get up the fine things. I do not wish to praise myself, but I am so strong I shall work so well. I would rather be the scrubbing sister all my days here than live like a queen without the walls."

"My child," replied the Superior, "our rule would not permit it." Then, touched by the bitter grief she saw in the young face before her, she added, soothingly, "I am not saying that you should not enter some other order, or even become a serving sister in some branch of this order, where you would not be known, but here it could not be. You know, my child, how greatly we depend upon our school; it is a school of high class, and you could never have been admitted into it had not your poor dear father died; and even then you were only received as a special favour to Mr. Butler and to Madame Claire. You see, we profess to take none but young ladies, and it was as a lady you came to us. For one of our pupils to become a serving sister would ruin the tone and the prestige of our school. You see, now, my dear, how impossible it would be?"

"Since you say it is impossible, reverend mother, of course it is impossible."

"That is behaving like a dear, sensible child; and now, love, think. Do you feel a vocation for any other order?"

"I don't know," said the girl, a little coldly, "I have never thought of any other order."

"Ah, my child, you must not be hurt by my words. I fear, Deirdrè, that you are proud. A true vocation would lead you to enter one convent as soon as another; but you are wounded because we cannot receive you here."

"Yes, I am wounded," said the girl in a voice full of tears; "not my pride, but my heart is hurt. Ah, reverend mother! you ladies have been all to me for many years. I love you all so dearly. I wished to return to live among you so much—so much. No other convent could ever become what this is to me. I love every stone in the walls, every slate on the roof."

"That, dear child, is a sweet feeling, but it is one of nature—of a good, true nature, certainly; but, Deirdrè, you must feel yourself that it is not a feeling of grace. I greatly doubt whether, feeling so, you could be allowed to enter here were you eligible in every other way. What crucifixion of the will, what sacrifice would it be to you, feeling as you do, to enter here?"

"None whatever," said the girl contritely.

"Then, dear child, it would not be well for you to come in here. Consider whether you feel a vocation for any other order. Pray over it, and ask for grace to see your way. And now go, my dear. No one can help you till your mind is clearer; and I will see you again to-morrow."

Deirdrè left the little parlour with a sick aching at her heart, with a feeling, too, of indignation. She did not go to the chapel; she felt in no holy mood. She went to her cell, locked the door, and threw herself on the bed and wept many bitter tears. Dear old convent! how she loved it, how she loved them all; but they did not care for her, though her

whole heart was theirs for them to take or break it. And Mr. Bellingham, whom she did not love, he loved her; how sad that was. She could not love him any more than they could love her. Somehow, now that her own love had been rejected, she valued his as she had not valued it before. It was very ungrateful not to return the love that he who was so high and great had been generous enough to offer to a lowborn, penniless creature like herself. It was very pleasant to feel that somebody loved her; that her lowly origin on one side, and her good education on the other, were not to everyone's mind impassable barriers, leaving her an outcast from every class.

To go to a strange convent, to be a serving sister elsewhere, among strangers, to associate for ever with women of the servant class, that would indeed be a crucifixion. There was a world of difference between serving here and elsewhere. It would be a little dull always to go on cleaning and scrubbing without any change or any thought of change as long as life endured. With the ladies in the choir it was different; they had their grades, they rose to be officers in the community, they sat in the council and governed the affairs. But she would have no share in this; it would be, from the day she made her vows to the day she died, the same round of daily toil—not toil of mind, but of her hands and arms. Somehow it seemed rather a waste of education; and that education, so much above her class, must have been given for some good purpose. It looked so different when it was a question of serving, not with but against inclination; but inclination should have nothing to say to one's choice of life. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." She knelt down and remained on her knees until she could add from her heart, without any reservation, "Be it done to me according to thy word."

Then she felt fit to go and pray in the chapel. Excepting at meal-times she remained there throughout the day, and as silence at meals was the rule of the house, she spoke no word

to anyone after she left the Superior's room. All the day she passed in prayer and contemplation, yet she arrived no nearer a decision. She did not know in the least—putting duty aside—whether she did or did not wish to marry Bellingham. Her mind had been so long at extreme tension that before night came she could fix her attention on nothing—not even for a single minute.

The next morning she was again summoned to the Superior's parlour.

"Well, my dear," said that lady with her mild smile, "now tell me all about it; have you decided this weighty question?"

Deirdre shook her head. She felt wonderfully stupid and indifferent that morning; nothing seemed to matter very much. She was so tired. She felt in a cloud so dense that she could scarcely see or hear, and her understanding was blunted.

"I am no nearer a decision than I was when I came," she answered listlessly.

This certainly was provoking. Here was a young woman who, having received an excellent offer, was unable after much reflection and advice to make up her mind, not only whether she wished to marry the man or not, but whether she felt any vocation strong enough to warrant her refusing him on that ground. The Lady Superior sighed—but the girl's heavy eyes and languid manner aroused her sympathy. "We must talk it over again, love," she said, without the least shade of annoyance in her voice. "Let us consider it again, and try and make up our minds; and now, my child, tell me what are the difficulties."

"I don't know what is right," said the girl with a sigh; and then she told the Mother how she felt about becoming a lay-sister; how it would at first be rather a cross in a strange place, but that she wished to do the will of Heaven if she could only see clearly what that was; yet it seemed to her a waste of the advantages of her refined education to sink again to the lower class. "That may be only a temptation. I only told you, reverend mother, because you said I

might tell you everything." And then she told of her times of nervous horror, which made her doubt her right to marry.

"Monsieur Bellingham naturally knows nothing of your occasional depression?"

"Oh yes," cried the girl. "I told him, of course. It was so generous of him to want to marry me; I could not say no, and not tell him every reason why I said it; nor could I let him marry me in ignorance. To go mad single: that would be very sad, but to let that generous man take a wife who perhaps——"

"And what did he say?" interrupted the lady, smiling.

"He said just as you say, that it is natural. That seems the saddest part," she added thoughtfully.

"Why so, my child?"

"Oh, it is bad enough to suffer alone, but to think that all the world goes through such torture——" Her eyes filled with tears of pity for the common woe.

"Ah, Deirdrè," remonstrated the Mother, "beware, my child, of the spiritual pride that loves to think its trials more than common."

The girl said nothing; she did not care to explain how far she was from feeling pride in her affliction. Mr. Bellingham had needed no explanation; he had entered into her feeling at once. She did not know how hard Bellingham had found it not to smile at her terrible confession; he had seemed all commiseration and sympathy.

"Then is this the sole difficulty—this hysteric fancy?"

"No," said Deirdrè; and then after a pause, "I don't think I love him."

"In fact, he is disagreeable to you?"

"Not at all." How impossible it was to make people understand what one meant.

"Then he does not displease you?"

"On the contrary, reverend mother, I find him most agreeable."

"Perhaps for some reason you cannot respect him. Is he a Catholic?"

"He is very lax."

"And not serious in religion?"

"I think he is serious."

"Then if he is serious, the influence of a religious woman might do much for him."

"That is just what he says himself," said Deirdrè, turning as red as a rose.

"And that you are of all women the one to help him?" added the Superior, smiling and taking the girl's chin in her hand, so as to turn the blushing face towards her.

"He is so good as to say that, but he must know very many better."

"Still, my child, if he loves you, and by that means you can lead him upwards; if you respect him and he is pleasing to you, what more do you want?"

"Only to feel that I love him."

"You would not wish to be so unmaidenly as to love before your love was asked. It is not yet ten days since he asked you. That is still soon to speak of love."

"So Mrs. Butler and Mr. Bellingham himself say."

"They are right. To those who marry with respect, love will follow."

"Everyone says the same thing!"

"Moreover, the greatest love should always be on the man's side."

Both Mrs. Butler and Rose had told her that too. It seemed strange that he should give home, position, money, name, and love, and she give nothing in return. Still everyone, even the man himself, assured her that was the right way, and that it should be so.

"I think I shall do well to accept him," said the girl, doubtfully.

"Do as your conscience and your heart tell you, my child."

Her heart told her to remain at Bonsecours, which was

impossible; her conscience told her nothing. Love of that kind had played no part in her education; it was to come after marriage. She respected the man, and was grateful for his love; since she had discovered that love would not open the gates of Bonsecours to her she had become beyond measure grateful for his affection. She had no good reason for refusing him, for her advisers were unanimous in setting all her scruples aside. Further explanation, further talk, were useless. As a last resource she begged to be allowed to go and see Céline Picard, who being newly married might perhaps prove a wise counsellor in a difficulty of this sort, so to Céline Picard's she set forth in the early afternoon.

Never in her life before had Deirdrè walked alone in the streets of Villecourt. There was an exhilarating sense of adventure and of doing something not wrong, but slightly improper, about the proceeding which rendered it so exciting that she felt quite sorry when she reached Madame Picard's door. Madame was at home and was at liberty, and in another moment the two girls were locked in each others' arms. There was, of course, much kissing and carressing, much surprise and joy and wonder at seeing Deirdrè so soon back at Bonsecours, many reproaches that she had not told her friend she was coming, many questions as to how long she had been there, and when she was going away. Then Deirdrè, too, had her string of inquiries, her answers to receive, and Céline had all the news of the neighbourhood to impart, so that for some time Miss Dineen quite forgot the chief motive of her visit.

"Céline," she said at last, looking at her companion's beaming face, "how happy you look."

"Ah, my love, my beautiful friend, don't tell me that—it must look so silly; and I am always trying to hide my happiness. It is not well, you know, for Antoine to perceive it too plainly. I look everywhere, Deirdrè, for a husband who should make you as happy as he makes me, but alas!—I often ask myself, what have I done to be so blest? Alas!—there is not a second Antoine in all the world."

"He loves you so much?"

"He adores me; why I can't think, for I am little adorable; but my dear man finds me lovely. And, Deirdrè, he is so good, so good. It is like heaven to be so happy."

"Before he asked you did you love him like that?" asked Deirdrè, eagerly.

"Heavens, no!" cried Céline, at once laughing and shocked. "I never saw him till he asked my parents for me. I saw but little of him until after our marriage."

"Then the love came afterwards?"

"That, it seems to me, is the right way," said Céline, with dignity.

"Ah, Céline," cried Deirdrè, "I don't wish to be impertinent, I only want to know, because——"

And then she told her friend about her little love affair, and Madame Picard listened with enraptured sympathy and strenuous advice in favour of matrimony. "There is no happiness to equal it in heaven or on the earth," she concluded, rather to Deirdrè's horror; but all the world seemed to agree as to the desirability of marriage, and that evening Deirdrè wrote to Rose to inform her when she would be returning to Cornwall Terrace, and also to tell her friend that she had resolved to accept Mr. Bellingham.

CHAPTER VI.

BELLINGHAM was exceedingly unhappy while Miss Dineen was at Bonsecours. A convent, he felt sure, was no place for the happy conclusion of a love affair. The nuns having once caught Deirdrè in their toils would refuse to let her go, and would certainly persuade her to give up her lover. They would work upon her feelings, and by curious and unlawful arts induce the girl to enter their order. She and he would alike be sacrificed to their worldly machinations; though why even the worldliest of nuns should be anxious to secure so penniless a sister as poor Deirdrè Dineen would have puzzled the mind of any man who was not in love.

But Bellingham was very much in love. Deirdrè was so supremely desirable to him that he thought she must be equally desirable to the whole world. He was more miserable over his uncertainty than he would have believed it possible he could be about any woman. However, as the grief was of short duration, it is probable that he derived a certain satisfaction from his sorrow, for such ardent love was proof positive that he was still young. He could not, he assured himself, have been more in love had he been twenty years of age instead of one-and-forty. Yes, in this love Arthur found a renewal of his youth. The departure of his youth had been the one enduring grief of his life. He could not resign himself to growing middle-aged when his heart was as young as the heart of any boy at school. No lad, he was sure, had ever been more in love, more wretched while his lady kept him in suspense, more blest when she gave her long-withheld consent.

For at least a week after Deirdre's return Bellingham enjoyed perfect happiness, spending his mornings in devising alterations to his house, and his evenings at Deirdre's side in Mrs. Butler's drawing-room; and then he began to think how much pleasanter it would be when they were married. So the next time he found the girl alone he told her of his wish. What was to be gained by waiting? The house would be ready in a month—say the middle of March, the fourteenth.

"Oh, no, Arthur, that would still be Lent," pleaded Deirdre.

"Then Easter; when would Easter be?"

But Easter did not meet with the lady's wishes; she thought it was too soon. Arthur explained that in the season he could not spare the time to be married. As a portrait painter May and June were his harvest time; he could not lose a day of those months. Then Miss Dineen suggested that September would be a nice time.

Bellingham started back. "September! Good God, Deirdre, you can't expect me to keep on in this ridiculous position till September!"

"What ridiculous position?" asked the girl, with dignity.

A middle-aged *fiancé*, Bellingham explained, was absurd; and the fact that his love had no home of her own made his position still more awkward. He was always afraid of boring the Butlers, and at the same time he did not see half enough of the girl of his heart; he could not consent to wait beyond Easter. In this matter his little girl must let herself be guided by older and wiser heads. She had made up her mind to trust him with her life's happiness, and she must leave this little matter, like all else, in his hands. If it were for her good, heaven knew he would wait ten years to please her; but he, who had (unfortunately) seen so much more of life than she knew what was best.

So when Mrs. Butler and Rose came in, Deirdre heard Arthur telling them that the marriage was fixed for the middle of April, and that Deirdre wished to go to Paris for her wedding journey. The girl stood stunned and silent, and

on Mrs. Butler going up to her and kissing her, she burst into tears. It had been easy to consent to an indefinite marriage, still she could not—she could not—submit to this hasty union. But Bellingham felt that a man of fashion courting a young governess was a trifle ridiculous. Two months of it were quite as much as he could endure. In the meantime there was a good deal of disagreeable business to be got through.

The worst was the breaking of the news to his sister, Mrs. Stanley, who naturally disapproved of his choice. "That child," she cried angrily, when her brother told her of his engagement, "that child, with no more manners than a nursemaid! Good gracious, Arthur, you must be mad!" And though less intimate friends did not express this opinion, he knew that they shared it. So much as possible of the dreadful news Bellingham kept to himself. That Miss Dineen was the Butlers' governess was patent, but he told no one of her humble origin, and Irish gentlepeople are so frequently poor that it might come to pass that the orphan daughter of a landed proprietor was forced to earn her bread. True, no one very intimately acquainted with Irish history could suppose the family of Dineen to be descended from the Irish kings; but then, to the generality of Arthur's acquaintance, Dineen had as good a sound as O'Neil itself. The girl's Christian name was a great stumbling-block. Bellingham had thought that that name had a strange weird beauty of its own, well suited to her melancholy fascinating face. Deirdre, it seemed to him, was the most beautiful name in the world. But Mrs. Stanley had different views on nomenclature. She had never, she declared, heard so utterly preposterous a name. She felt sure it ought to be pronounced Deirder, and that the accent was a French affectation picked up at Bonsecours. "Theatre and saltpetre are both spelt that way, Arthur; depend upon it, it is Deirder—a sort of peasant name like Darby and Biddy, a corruption of something else."

Poor Bellingham was much distressed at this proposed

degradation of his darling's beautiful name to the social level of, say, Biddy Mulligan; he had made quite a feature of that name in the decoration of his lady's little boudoir, and was having a series of devotional books specially bound for her with Deirdrè stamped in gold on the cover. It was not pleasant to think he might as well have exalted the name of "Biddie" and blazoned it abroad.

When he next went to the Butlers' he asked the girl about the accent. He could see that she did not think the subject worth discussion, and would have liked Deirdrè as well as Deirdrè; but she was quite sure the accent was the right thing, for she should have remembered if she had ever been called Deirdrè. Moreover, Father Blake had written it Deirdrè in her "Garden of the Soul," and it was spelt that way in her missal she had had all her life since her baptism: "Deirdrè Dineen, with love from Deirdrè Fitzgerald;" but who Deirdrè Fitzgerald was, or whether Deirdrè was a common name, she knew not. The Butlers had never heard the name, but Mr. Butler fancied it must be the corruption of some saint's name, so unconsciously he strengthened Mrs. Stanley's theory.

Bellingham was astonished to find how much this thought annoyed him. He could only trust that most of his friends would, like himself, be ignorant enough to think the name pretty. There was one person who would be sure to know all about it, and he was Michael Hanlon. Arthur resolved to ask the young Irishman on the first opportunity, which he knew would soon occur, for he and Hanlon were doing a good deal of work together. He was illustrating a tale of Hanlon's which was running through the *Albany*, and the young man was now on the eve of a departure to Italy, to write the letterpress for a number of studies which Arthur had made a year or two before. Hanlon came constantly to the studio to look at the sketches, and make notes of the subjects that needed to be worked up to suit the principal illustrations.

Bellingham had not long to wait for a chance of setting

his mind to rest on the great name question, for only three days after he had announced his engagement to his sister, Hanlon called at the studio. It was early in the afternoon, the model was gone, and Bellingham was finishing some drapery with the help of the lay figure. It was an hour at which he always was more or less ready to receive stray visitors, for he dismissed his models at three and never left the studio till four. He was, therefore, not at all put out by a ring at the studio bell, and the sound of a voice up the speaking tube, "'Tis me—Hanlon."

Bellingham pulled a cord, and the sound of an outer door opening was heard, then steps, then an impetuous youthful flinging open of the inner door, and Mr. Michael Hanlon entered with less commotion than a whirlwind would have made.

"How d'ye do?" he cried in a melodious, full-toned Irish voice. "Are you busy, because if so tell me, and I'll be coming some other time. That's very fine," he continued, looking at Bellingham's work. "You'll finish it easily now in time for the Academy."

"I'm not so sure of that—I have—something has happened that gives me a good deal of extra work to do. No, don't go, Hanlon; I should tell you in a minute if I wanted you to go. Oh, I say, my dear fellow, don't go; I've been wanting to see you these three days or more."

"Is that so, or is it only politeness?" He pronounced it "politenus."

"No, really," said Bellingham, rolling a cigarette. "I do really want to see——"

"Well, don't let me interrupt your work. I will be looking at the sketches and you can be painting while we talk."

Bellingham lifted a portfolio on to the stand. "All right," he said, and returned to his work. Hanlon took out a pocket-book and pencil to make notes of the sketches.

When one looked at him Miss Butler's preference ceased to be so very surprising, for he was not only handsome, but had

a singularly pleasing face, with refined, well-cut features of the type Michael Angelo has immortalised in the bust of Guiliamo de Medici, full blue eyes, very frank and honest in their expression, and a flexible mouth with a frequent pleasant smile. A clear broad forehead, and a square, clean-cut jaw, redeemed the face from that look of weakness so often characteristic of faces readily made to smile. His figure was tallish, square-shouldered, and graceful, but there was a tendency to more movement and gesticulation than is usual among Englishmen. To finish, Mr. Hanlon was ill-dressed and decidedly shabby. He had seated himself under the top light, which brought into high relief the shininess of his worn jacket and even the tape binding round the wristbands of his shirt; but the defects of his attire never troubled Hanlon in the least.

"Well, Bellingham," he said, suddenly lifting his charming eager face from the portfolio; "you said you had been wanting to see me——"

"When do you start?" asked the painter, irrelevantly.

"Saturday. That's one reason I came to-day. There's a trip as far as Paris—seventeen shillings—so I may as well go then as Tuesday, and save the difference."

"Of course, of course," assented Bellingham, who would rather have remained at home for ever than have gone to Paris on a seventeen-shilling trip. "Then I sha'n't see you again."

"Not unless you really wish it. I'll finish cataloguing the sketches in an hour—don't feel obliged to stop in for me."

"But, my dear fellow, I want to have a talk with you; there's something I have to tell you. I suppose, Hanlon," he continued indifferently, "that I shall be married before you come back."

"Merciful powers!—is that so?" cried Hanlon, jumping up.

"Why ever didn't you tell me that before?"

"Well, for one thing, I only knew it myself about a fortnight ago."

"Well, this is interesting!" Hanlon left the portfolio and came up to Bellingham. "Is the lady any one I know?"

"No, but I hope you will soon know her," said Bellingham, tilting back his chair and reaching a sketch-book from the table. He opened it and handed it to the young man without speaking.

Hanlon looked at it for a minute or two in silence. Bellingham had opened it to show a pencil sketch which he had made of Deirdrè one afternoon.

"Ye're a fortunate man, Bellingham," he said seriously; "the lady is more than beautiful—she looks like an angel."

Hanlon was the first person who had congratulated him; it was Deirdrè who was generally considered fortunate.

"She is a compatriot of yours," said Bellingham, smiling and knocking the ash from the end of his cigarette. "I met her at Mrs. Butler's."

"Oh!" said Hanlon, rather coldly—he disapproved of the Butlers quite as much as they of him; and then, feeling that he had been unsympathetic, he added, "She is a compatriot to be very proud of. However, she will soon become a Saxon, I suppose, by marrying you."

"Yes; we shall be married at Easter. She doesn't know much about Ireland, for she has never lived there."

"So I supposed," replied Hanlon, with a peculiar smile.

"Oh, she's not an absentee," said Bellingham, laughing; "she is an orphan, and has only just left school. There is no reason at all why she should live in Ireland, though she has got a regular Irish name, or at least I suppose it's an Irish name, for no one here ever heard of it. Do you know it at all—Deirdrè?"

"Deirdrè!" cried Hanlon, in amazement. "Oh, but it's obsolete. Is that her Christian name?"

"Yes," said Bellingham. "You seem, like every one else, never to have heard of it."

"Oh, of course I've heard of it," said Hanlon, laughing,

"but I've never heard of any living person being called Deirdrè, though 'tis a very beautiful name."

"Only, as you express it, obsolete."

"Just so. I wonder however she came by it. Well, 'tis a good thing she is beautiful."

Hanlon looked at the sketch rather sadly; he was hoping fate would be kinder to this Deirdrè than to the unhappy wife of Naisi, and thinking how mournful the young face was.

"I presume there was some legendary person named Deirdrè," suggested Bellingham.

"A historic person," rejoined Hanlon. "Surely ye've heard of King Concobar and the champions of Usnach?"

Bellingham shook his head.

"I hope one of the champions of what-d'ye-call-it wasn't named Deirdrè," said he, a little alarmed.

"No," said Hanlon, shocked at this ignorance; "she was the wife of the youngest of them."

"Well, come, Hanlon, one can't be expected to remember the names of all your champions' wives."

"Of course not," assented Hanlon, smiling.

But Bellingham suspected, by the look on the young man's face, that he had betrayed the full extent of his ignorance.

"I think you had better tell me the story," he remarked.

"'Tis a very long one," said Hanlon, pulling out his watch, "and a very sad one. You had much better take it on trust."

"Oh, give us a summary of it," said Bellingham; "you must, now that you have raised my curiosity."

"I suppose," began Hanlon, who was always willing to talk, "ye've heard of Meave, the warrior-queen of Con-naught?"

"Yes," said Arthur mendaciously.

"Then you know that she married King Concobar, of Tara, and that they were unhappy, and separated?"

Arthur again assented.

"I can't think," said Hanlon, meditatively, "how it comes that the story of Queen Meave is so much more widely known than that of her husband. Well, Concoobar resolved to make a second marriage. He adopted a child and brought her up in a tower by herself. I must tell you that it had been prophesied that if this lady looked on a man before her marriage, much misery would come of it, and she was called Deirdre, that is to say, Alarm!"

"Good heavens!" cried Bellingham, "what a name!"

"It was rather alarming," continued Hanlon; "however, Concoobar thought to defy fate by keeping her in seclusion; but, you see, by the time she was old enough to be married Concoobar was getting fairly middle-aged, and the poor girl didn't care for the idea of marrying him at all; and one winter's day, when she was looking out of her tower, she saw a raven drinking blood in the snow——"

"Horrible!" said Bellingham.

"Not at all," cried Hanlon, indignantly. "It was the bird's nature, and the girl was struck by the beauty of the colouring. 'Ah!' she said, to herself, 'the man whom I would wish to marry should have those three colours—hair black as a raven, skin white as snow, with lips and cheeks as red as blood!'"

Arthur's artist nature recoiled within him.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed, and rolled another cigarette.

"Most unfortunately," continued Hanlon, whose artistic education had been neglected, "her remark was overheard by—I just for the moment forget by whom—but one of her attendants, and this person mentioned to the girl that the colouring of Naisi, the youngest of the champions of Usnach, was just what she described. I think you said you didn't remember who were the champions of Usnach, but I won't go into that now. They were three brothers—warriors as celebrated for their musical skill as for their valour. Well, nothing would satisfy the girl but that she must see Naisi; so one day, when she was to walk out on the plains of Ulster,

he was brought to the place. They fell in love at once, and, to cut the story short, she and Naisi eloped, taking with them about a hundred and twenty of Conor's men-at-arms."

"Who on earth was Conor?" interposed Bellingham.

"Concobar; 'tis the same name. He never really forgave the lovers, but he pretended to pardon them, and sent for them back. Poor Deirdre suspected treachery—you see she had known Conor years and years—but her fears and dreams were disregarded, and the deserters set out to return. When they reached the camp at Armagh the King ordered his soldiers to fall on them, and the men-at-arms were killed to a man. The three champions scorned to defend themselves against such treachery, and were slain as they sat playing chess."

"Three of them?" asked Arthur, critically.

"And Deirdre," continued Hanlon, without heeding this interruption, "was taken by the King for his wife; but he got no benefit from his wickedness, for, poor girl! 'her heart breaking nut-wise,' as the old books have it, she died."

"And is this dismal lady the only Deirdre in Irish history?"

"I know of no other," said Hanlon. "But really from just that sketch I gave of the plot of it you can have no idea what a beautiful story it is. Let me lend you my old history book, Bellingham; you'd delight in many of the stories."

"About the blood-and-snow gentlemen? No, thank you, Hanlon, I'm not much of a reader; and, don't you know, they would not paint well. I think the race has improved since those days."

Hanlon picked up the sketch-book. "I don't wonder that you should think that, Bellingham," he said, smiling, "but do you know 'tis four o'clock. I must be looking over these drawings before dark, but don't you stay; you must have much to do after painting hours," he continued, putting out his hand for farewell.

"Well, if you don't really mind."

"Of course not. Good-bye, Bellingham; there is little need to wish you happiness, for ye've got it."

"Thanks all the same. Good-bye, Hanlon; *bon voyage*," and Bellingham was gone.

Hanlon found it very pleasant alone in the studio, which was more like a drawing-room than a workshop, so full was it of comfort and of pretty things. There were the Eastern embroideries and porcelain, the Spanish cabinets and Italian cassoni, the Persian rugs and Flemish tapestries, the French armour and English carved oak, which go to make up a modern interior. A very cultured person might, perhaps, have objected that Bellingham's studio, like his painting, was without style. There are those who cannot see without pain a knight in armour reclining on a Louis XVI. *canapé*. But Hanlon was not of their number; he recognised that all the things were pretty, and he did not see why they should not be together. Neither did Bellingham when he acquired them, but now he was conscious of every incongruity, every anachronism, and he felt quite angry when people admired his "beautiful studio." Hanlon's knowledge of decoration was elementary; he enjoyed the soft bright colours and the picturesque arrangement of the room, its pleasant irregularities and homelike disorder, without noting that all was not in keeping. Moreover, he did not see the advantage of living in a late age without profiting by the wisdom of our forefathers, and if chairs were made best in one century and tables in another, the business of the third was to use both of the best period.

The young man thought how pleasant it must be to be like Bellingham, well off and prosperous, and able to marry the girl of his heart, by which we may suppose that somewhere in the old country there was a girl who had Michael Hanlon's heart in her keeping. But Kitty, no doubt, would be married and settled years before he was well enough off even to ask her, and where would be the pleasure of being rich then! He sighed as he took up his hat and turned to leave the studio. Bellingham had locked the door leading on to the street, and Hanlon went through another one into a passage made beautiful with rugs and tapestries, and thence into a

small square entrance-hall, furnished like a sitting-room, and with its walls covered with etchings and prints. It was dusk now, and the firelight flashing and twinkling made of the little hall a charming picture. Ah, Bellingham was a lucky man to be able to bring a girl to such a home.

Whew! how the wind blew as Hanlon opened the door—a genuine March wind before which every one bowed. It shrivelled up the old people and blew through the young ones, and wrapped itself round their bones. Hanlon's thin summer overcoat was no protection against such weather. But how came it that a rising author who had published three most successful novels was so thinly and shabbily clad? Do we not all know authors, even ladies, who have received fabulous sums for their first books? But suppose that one gets, say fifty pounds once a year for a novel, that will not keep one precisely in luxury. And Mr. Hanlon had never as yet received so large a sum as fifty pounds at one time. Hitherto money had come in dribblets—thirty shillings for this article, two pounds two for that, a five pound note for the year's half profit for his novel. The young man had as yet no regular employment in London, no fixed income to meet his expenditure. In years gone by, when he was young (he was now five-and-twenty), he had had a post on a Kildare weekly, but the paper had died, and Hanlon had come to seek his fortune with the Saxon. He was quite a byword of success. "Look how young Hanlon has got on," one used to say to encourage literary aspirants. "What reviews he has had for that novel, and it is already in an American edition." But before the days of the American edition—for which, by the way, he did not get a penny—before the days of that review in the *Times*, Michael had spent years of poverty in London. He had, perhaps, nothing to complain of, for he had never had to borrow, and he had not often gone to bed hungry, and he had always contrived to send home a certain sum to help with the schooling of his brothers; still, to do that he had lived for months together on bread and cheese, and

had passed whole winters without a sitting-room fire. I suppose Mrs. Smith must have known that her lodger was cold and hungry, but no one else suspected. None of his friends guessed that Hanlon looked pale because he was hungry, thin because he was anxious and knew not how Mrs. Smith was to be paid her rent. Still less did his own people in Limerick suspect at what cost prosperous Mick sent home some of his economies. For Hanlon was always bright and pleasant, always hopeful, eager, and full of life. Hunger and fatigue troubled him wonderfully little; anxiety did sometimes wear him, but troubles past were with Michael troubles forgotten, and as for troubles ahead, he never saw any; he lived in an atmosphere of hope, and enjoyed to the full the pleasures that come of youth and companionship. And now as he hurried from Kensington to Shepherd's Bush he did not feel the cold and wind. In his mind he was already in Italy. Addison Road was shaded with orange-trees, the wind was the tramontana, and even his own bow window had quite a classic look.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. BUTLER and Rose often said to themselves and to one another that this engagement was an intolerable nuisance. "Fond as I am of Deirdrè," Mrs. Butler would say, "nothing will induce me ever again to have a governess under five-and-thirty, or with the slightest pretensions to good looks. Yet I cannot be otherwise than nice to such an old friend as Arthur Bellingham; and Deirdrè has, I think, behaved remarkably well. Still one can have too much even of Mr. Bellingham."

But though Mrs. Butler thus bewailed her fate to her daughter, she always made Bellingham welcome, and was extremely kind to Deirdrè. When the engagement became an acknowledged fact, both she and Rose had suggested to Deirdrè that she should resign her post of governess and adopt the position of visitor until her marriage; but the girl would not hear of such an arrangement. It would, she protested, make her miserable; she would, since Mrs. Butler was so good, behave as a guest when Arthur was there, but she must beg to be allowed to go on in the old way, or she should be wretched. She was so obviously in earnest, and there was so much sense in what she said, that Mrs. Butler allowed her to have her own way, though she insisted on a great number of half holidays, on which Deirdrè and Rose went out shopping together.

At Dineen's death his savings and property amounted only to fifty pounds. Deirdrè had always had the interest of that small sum for pocket-money, and now the money itself had to be applied to the purchase of her wedding outfit. All that, the Butlers agreed, had been a tremendous bother and worry,

yet when the wedding had taken place the whole family felt very dull. Mrs. Butler assured herself in vain that it was a good thing over, for Jim was sulky, Rose crying on her bed, and Kate and Emily quarrelling in the schoolroom in a way that had seemed a thing of the past while their beloved mademoiselle was with them. Certainly no one had ever kept the little girls so good and made them so happy as Deirdrè had done, probably because no one else had ever been half so fond of them.

The wedding had been a quiet one—no wedding at all, merely a marriage, as Rose expressed it. Still it had been an excitement, and the home seemed dull now that it was over; and everybody missed Deirdrè. They would have thought it impossible that one quiet girl could have been so much missed, but she had been so fond of them all, and love is so endearing that they had become very fond of her. There was, Rose said, one great consolation, and that was Deirdrè was to live in Kensington; also it was a comfort that the bridal pair were only to be away about a fortnight, first to see the Salon and then, if the weather were fine, to spend a few days at Fontainebleau.

Deirdrè's wedding day had been bright and sunny, but the next day was wet and windy, and the day after that also windy and wet. About fifty times daily Rose lamented the weather and the terrible voyage her friend would have from Dover to Calais, but on the fourth morning she found a letter on the breakfast table in Deirdrè's writing and with the Dover postmark. "Dear old girl; fancy her being at Dover still. Now for some raptures on Bellingham," murmured Rose as she opened the letter. She read it through, and then turned it and read it again.

"Well," said Mr. Butler, looking up from *The Times*, "is it very rapturous?"

"No," replied Rose, with a sigh; "it's rather disappointing—not funny at all. It's a great score off me, don't you know, for I had meant to chaff her most awfully."

Mr. Butler suggested that very likely a prevision of Miss Rose's teasing had checked Deirdre's ardour.

"If you like," said Rose, "I'll read it to you and then you'll see."

"Yes, do," assented Mrs. Butler, who also had a little note from the bride; "my note says nothing but thanks for all our kindness to her. I'm sure we didn't do much. I do hope the poor child is happy."

"Well, now I'm going to begin, so please be quiet, and don't crackle the newspaper, papa.

"MY DEAREST ROSE,—

"You will be wondering that you have not heard from me, but we have expected to cross by every boat, and I have been waiting to write from the other side. But the wind keeps so high and it rains so much that Arthur thinks we are better where we are; but as we may cross any time, please address, when you write, to the Hôtel du Louvre, Paris. We have a sitting-room which faces the sea, and I watch the great waves all the day; they are so magnificent, but so mournful, it makes one very sorry for all who are tossed on them. I am so glad that I went against your advice, and brought the stole and maniple with me. I have nearly finished one end of the stole already, besides getting nearly to the heel of a silk sock for Arthur. ("Dear old girl," said Rose, in parenthesis, "she can never have had her work out of her hand for a moment, night or day, for of all the slow workers in the world Deirdre is the slowest.") Please give my very respectful and most grateful sentiments to Mr. Butler (I am writing to Mrs. Butler by this post), and love to Kate and Emily, and believe me, my own dearest,

"Your most affectionate,

"DEIRDRE BELLINGHAM."

"Does she say nothing about being happy?" inquired Mrs. Butler, anxiously.

Rose handed the letter to her mother. "I don't know what to make of it," she said.

"Oh, there is nothing to make of it," said Mr. Butler, with masculine superiority. "You will find that the girl is happy enough. Perhaps Bellingham was looking over her; besides, she's so confoundedly reserved, she wouldn't move if you ran a pin into her suddenly. She's a nice girl and a very good girl, but after all there is something in race. She might be fresh from Ballymoneyboy; she's got that impassive Irish manner to a frightful extent."

Mrs. Butler, who was a Saxon, resented this aspersion on Irish manners. "Nonsense, James," she cried; "you know nothing about Irish people. How in the world would 'wild Irish girls' have become proverbial if they were all like Deirdre?"

"Ah, my dear," said Mr. Butler, rising, "proverbs are proverbially false."

"That is so like a man," said his wife contemptuously. She was extremely fond of her husband and her son, and any deep rooted aversion she felt for the nobler sex she concealed well, but to say anything was like a man was her bitterest reproach; and Mr. Butler, feeling justly humiliated at her reference to the natural disgrace of his sex, left the room.

"Oh, mamma," cried Rose, the moment they were alone, "I don't believe she's happy; she couldn't have written like that if she were happy."

Mrs. Butler re-read the letter. "No," she said, "I don't think she felt happy when she wrote that, poor child; but I remember I hated my wedding tour, and the rain and the wind and the sea have depressed her. I expect, too, she feels rather strange with her husband as yet; depend upon it she will be all right in a few weeks; only, love, don't let her see that you think her unhappy."

"No," said Rose. "Oh, how I *hope* she will be happy; I feel, don't you, mamma? as if we were somehow responsible

for her. If it hadn't been for us she would never have seen Arthur. However, perhaps you are right. I wrote yesterday to her to Paris, and I think I won't write again till I've heard from her."

The tone of Mrs. Bellingham's next letter, which was dated from Paris, was much more cheerful; and in the one from Fontainebleau she stated that she was enjoying the spring beauty of the forest immensely, and was very sorry to think the holiday was all but ended. And this letter finished with a little postscript in praise of Arthur, whom his bride declared to be the kindest man in the world. From a person of so great and varied experience as Mrs. Bellingham this praise was praise indeed. A week later Rose had a note of two lines, posted from Kensington, announcing the return of the Bellinghams.

Mrs. Butler said that she would delay making her call on the bride until she was ostensibly at home, so Rose rather gladly set out alone to see her friend the next afternoon. She had often been to Bellingham's pretty red brick abode before, and she noticed that even the outside of it was a good deal altered. There were light curtains to the drawing-room windows, and flower boxes filled with irises and jonquils on the window-sills. The house looked very cheerful in the spring sunlight with its flowery windows and its little garden gay with hawthorns and laburnums.

Mrs. Bellingham was at home, and Rose went up into the drawing-room, which was newly furnished, Bellingham in his bachelor days having used it as a sort of artistic lumber-room; but now all trace of canvas and tobacco jars had disappeared; Japanese silks and embroideries, luxurious chairs, old porcelain, and spindle-legged tables reigned in their stead, and the drawing-room was a refined edition of the studio.

There was a piece of church embroidery on one of the tables, so evidently Mrs. Bellingham was already in full possession of the room. Certainly dear old Deirdre, thought Miss Butler, was a fortunate girl to have achieved so

charming a home. Just at that moment Deirdrè came into the room.

"Dear Rose, how kind——" she began, clasping her friend to her; but she had no chance of finishing her remark upon Rose's kindness, for that voluble young lady commenced with great fluency—

"Ah, Deirdrè, you DEAR old girl! It *is* jolly to see you again, you can't think how miserable we've all been without you; we wish, don't you know, about fifty times a day that you'd never met Bellingham, though that's very selfish of us, I suppose, for *you* don't look as if *you'd* been fretting for *us*. You look charming. I shouldn't think, though, that Bellingham *quite* approves of that blue necktie, now does he?"

"He has not as yet seen it," said Deirdrè, laughing. "I put it on new for you." Mrs. Bellingham was still such a very unsophisticated person that she thought every question needed an answer. But before she had stopped speaking Rose began again—

"*Dear* old girl, how sweet of you, though it's hideous, and perhaps, don't you know, not quite *de la dernière mode*. Still you look charming in it and in that grey cashmere, too. Ah, Deirdrè, you're one of those lucky people who can wear anything; you look well, as they say, in a rag."

Had time been allowed her, Mrs. Bellingham might perhaps have protested at her new gown being stigmatised as a rag; but Miss Butler had not nearly exhausted her breath yet.

"And what a jolly room. You must be awfully happy in it. Was it all arranged like this when you came back, or did you do it? I don't think I need ask, though; it doesn't look much like your taste. That horsehair sofa is conspicuous, as the newspapers say, by its absence. And you must pine for those prints of saints, and angels, and *bons curés* and things you're so fond of. Now own, Deirdrè, you'd have preferred plaster saints to those hawthorn vases—you know you would. But all this time you've never told me

when you came back, or how you enjoyed yourself, or anything."

"We came back the night before last—just when I sent you that note to say we were home."

"How sweet of you to have let me know at once; and now tell me about the beloved Arthur. Has he converted you to a proper sense of the importance of art yet?"

Deirdre closed her lips very firmly and then slowly shook her head. "I'm glad Arthur doesn't paint things like those in the Salon. I call them simply disgusting——"

Rose began to laugh. The severity of this sweeping criticism amused her.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Deirdre. "It's a very serious question, Rose, that of models and artists. You who know so many painters must often think of it."

"I'm laughing at you, of course, you dear straightlaced old thing. All artists, you know, do draw from the nude; it's all a question of how well they do it whether they show the pictures afterwards or not, but they all do it."

"I'm sure Arthur never did such a thing in his life," said Deirdre, with conviction. "But, now, come, Rose, I want to show you the house; it is so pretty, it is wonderful how anyone could imagine anything so pretty."

The girls went over the house, and then back to the drawing-room to tea. "Tell Mr. Bellingham that Miss Butler is here, and that tea is ready," commanded Mrs. Bellingham; but Rose saw by her manner that she had hardly the courage to deliver this order, and certainly William, who was an old retainer, was rather an intimidating personage. However, he condescended to deliver the message, and shortly afterwards Bellingham, in a most æsthetic painting coat, appeared.

"How good of you," he said, shaking hands with Rose,
* "to come to see my little girl so soon. She looks ever so much better for seeing you. She is a little bit knocked up by her journey, don't you know." And then they all chatted till Rose

said she must be off. Bellingham put her into a cab, and then went back to his wife.

"How charming she is," he said. "Such a stunning little figure, and such style! She looked like a little Tissot to-day, exactly. I should say Miss Rose is quite aware of her charms, she makes the most of 'em."

"Oh no, she is not in the least vain, and she might be," cried Deirdre, staunchly.

"No, you are right, my lovely one," said the husband, drawing his wife towards him. "No vain girl would have let *you* appear in her drawing-room. Deirdre, love," he continued, tenderly bending down over the girl, "tell me that you are happy with your old husband, and that you like your new home."

"I like the home, Arthur, because it's a symbol of your love. It is the love I care for, it is the love that makes me happy. The pretty things I like, Arthur, because you care for them, and so they seem a part of you, who are so very, very good to me."

During this conversation Bellingham had sat down and pulled his wife gently on to his knee; his arms were round her, and she laid her face on his shoulder and began softly caressing his hand with her own. She had, you see, become fond of her husband. She was deeply grateful to him, and his love was very dear to her, even though she was not in love with him. He was her best, her kindest friend, the one person in the world with whom she was the first consideration. Perhaps her feeling was more akin to that of a daughter to her indulgent father, or a young sister to a kind elder brother, than any other sentiment. She was as fond of him as of Madame Ursule or Madame Angélique, and what more would you have? Her affection, if not the fiery sentiment which young love is supposed to be, was sufficient to make her and her husband, in the first weeks of their married life, extremely happy.

Still the marriage state was not without its trials. This

young wife was, like many another, in fear of her servants and profoundly ignorant of the management of the house. She was an admirable needlewoman; there was no kind of sewing, plain or fancy, which she could not do to perfection; but here her household knowledge ended. All her life she had been accustomed to obey promptly, unquestioningly. It had been, Deirdre, do this—Deirdre, do that. Her existence, until she went to the Butlers, had been regulated by the ringing of the chapel bell; and during the five months she had passed at Cornwall Terrace she had also been in a subservient position—lesson-hours, play-hours, everything had been arranged before her arrival. All she had had to do had been to observe the appointed timetable and enforce obedience from two tractable little girls. And now, suddenly, she found herself the head of a house. She had to think not only for herself but for her servants, to regulate their lives as well as her own. The upper servants had lived with Bellingham before his marriage, and I am afraid the poor bride suffered much at their hands. Any change she suggested was received with black looks, and a sullen hope that "Master, he would like it, but," &c., &c.; and then, unless it were a matter of conscience, the poor girl would humbly withdraw her orders, and, as it were, beg pardon for having wished to manage her own home.

But these little troubles with the servants, this difficulty that she found in thinking for herself and in making up her mind what to do when she had no one to command her, were not the most appalling of the young wife's anxieties. There was a day which hung over her head like the sword of Damocles, a day when Mrs. Bellingham was to be "at home." Every lady to whom Bellingham had announced his engagement had said how much she wished to know his wife, so he had arranged that on a certain day Deirdre should be "at home." Even Mrs. Stanley, now that the deed was done, forgave her brother so far as to offer to visit his wife. She had, of course, been invited to the wedding, but it being Easter

time, she was out of town; still she sent Deirdre a present and a friendly letter, saying that she should call on her on her return. The prospect of Mrs. Stanley's visit was an added terror to that reception day.

The male mind shrinks from these bridal gatherings. The homage paid to the bride is doubtless pleasant enough, but the bridegroom feels himself ridiculous; besides, it may possibly happen that he will be the only man in the room—a very embarrassing situation. Therefore no one will be surprised that Bellingham had an unavoidable engagement on his wife's "at home" day. Softened, however, by her supplications, he promised to be back as early as he could. Deirdre did not see how she should ever get through that afternoon, and as Rose, most unluckily, had a cold, she would have to get through it alone. She was so nervous that by four o'clock she felt quite ill, and looked ill too. She should not know one person from another; she was not sure that she should even recognise Mrs. Stanley, her sister-in-law, whom she had never seen since the day of Arthur's Christmas party, and who, she felt certain, had been very averse to his marriage. What should she say? What would they do when they came into the room? What—and this was the most appalling thought—what ought she to do? She had not the slightest idea.

Poor child! She had no knowledge of the ways of the world, no self-confidence, no inherent *savoir faire*. She had no aptitude for general conversation, and the habit of silent hours that prevailed at the convent rendered silence perfectly natural and unembarrassing to her. But now she knew that she would be expected to talk. In this dilemma, as in every other, she appealed to Heaven for assistance, and then invented imaginary conversations, in order that when anyone came she might find plenty to say. Presently the bell rang, and several strangers entered the room almost at the same moment. She did not hear their names, they had no identity in her eyes. She said "How do you do?" to each of them, and then what more was there to say? She could not remember

the conversations she had prepared; her tongue seemed paralysed. It was evident that she was terribly embarrassed. Every moment her discomfort increased, and when Mrs. Stanley was announced she became so nervous that she could barely get through the inevitable "How do you do?" There was someone in the room with whom Mrs. Stanley was acquainted, and to this lady, greatly to Deirdre's relief, Mrs. Stanley began talking; but her hard, criticising, contemptuous gaze was fixed unswervingly on her poor young sister-in-law, who became so white and tremulous that her more considerate guests felt nothing but pity for her, and helped her all they could. At last one lady, with mistaken kindness, began on the fatal subject.

"You are Irish, are you not, Mrs. Bellingham?"

"Yes."

"I have never been to Ireland, but it is a very beautiful country, is it not?"

"Yes."

"You must miss the beautiful scenery. Is it long since you left Ireland?"

"I was a child," began Deirdre, with strained grey lips. How ghastly it all seemed!—her father struggling in his living grave, fighting for air, and she—she gave a gasp and a sigh, and then the room went round and the floor went up, and all became suddenly dark.

A minute or two later Bellingham entered the room. There was his wife stretched full length on the floor, surrounded by sympathetic ladies bending over her, loosening her collar, fanning her, sprinkling water on her brow.

"Good heavens!" he cried, "what is the matter? Is she ill? Whatever has happened?"

A murmur about nervousness, faintness, many strangers, trying position, so young, rose from the kneeling and sympathising ladies; and Mrs. Stanley, who was watching the scene with a cynical sneer, said, "She is so little used to society, poor thing."

By this time Deirdre was half conscious, and was making unavailing efforts not to cry. Her guests were most kind; they gave tea to their hostess, they waited on her. But Bellingham felt that she had made a fool of herself.

The hysteric girl, with her pale, tear-stained face and dishevelled locks, with her simple merino gown and unformed figure, looked, as indeed she was, a girl fresh from a provincial convent school. She had no manner, no style; she seemed a different order of being to the well-dressed women of the world who surrounded her. Still she showed courage; she dried her eyes and twisted up her hair, and would not say she was ill. Her husband was kindness itself; he did all the talking, and relieved her in every way he could, and she had no conception that he was angry with her, nor indeed that she had given him any just cause for anger. She was vexed with herself for having fainted, but it was a matter beyond her control—a misfortune, that was all. She was therefore alarmed at the sudden change which came over Arthur's face when their last guest went away. He strode up to her, and said, in a voice husky with passion—

“How could you make such a fool of yourself? How *dare* you go making a fool of me like that? What do you suppose those women think of you? Do you expect to be treated as a lady by people who have seen you conduct yourself like that? Bah! I have no patience with such illbred idiocy. What on earth is there to be afraid of in a dozen kindly women that you must be reduced to imbecility from mere fright? And why ever can't you make yourself look more like other people? I never see any other woman dressed as you are. Never, I beg of you, let me see you again in that beastly thing, with the buttons all to one side. That style of thing was well enough when you were a nursery governess, but it will not do for my wife!”

Deirdre was by this time as angry as her husband; her mind was full of indignation, but, being unready with her tongue, she could think of nothing more scathing than—

"You are a very cruel man." And then she turned and left the room.

Bellingham made no effort to stop her. He was supported by a comfortable assurance that he was in the right. This hysteric tendency must be put down, or it would be Andreina over again. Young ladies need not faint if they took the trouble to exercise sufficient self-control; and, above all things, it was annoying that the girl should have chosen to make a fool of herself when Susan was there. Certainly, Mrs. Stanley's expression had been galling. Bellingham went down to the studio and lighted a cigar. He felt now that Susan was right: he had been a fool to marry again out of his sphere; one experience ought to have taught him that none but a lady could fulfil his needs. Already, when he had been married little more than a month, he began to see that he had a second time made a fool of himself for a pretty face. The girl was doubtless invaluable as a model, but a man is an idiot to marry a model. How *gauche* she was; he was always feeling ashamed of her; this was not the first time. Why on earth need she say that she had never been on horseback in her life? Why need she tell people that she did not know how to dance? Only the night before last she had said to young Dawn, when he had been introduced to her, "Please don't ask me to dance, I'm much too frightened." Yes, Susan was right; he had been a fool to marry the girl. Bellingham could recall a score of grievances; but now he had got her he must train her; he must, even at the risk of seeming harsh at times, train her into the ways of society.

Meanwhile, the young wife was undergoing agonies of remorse. She had not reached her bedroom before she had felt how utterly and entirely it was she who was to blame. No wonder Arthur was vexed with her! Her stupid, senseless terror was enough to annoy any man. No wonder he had been angry and had felt it necessary to scold her. They had never spoken quite in that way when they were vexed with her at Bonsecours, but then that was a religious house. She

could not feel that his wrath was excessive, since every word he said had been perfectly true. She had made a fool of herself, and she was not a lady, and she did look like a nursery governess in that dress. Those ladies who had come to visit her had certainly a very different appearance; and her manner, it was like a schoolgirl's. No wonder poor Arthur had felt ashamed of her; no wonder he had been a little harsh in telling her of her bad manners. And she, an overwhelming sense of shame came upon her when she remembered how ill she had taken his reproof—how wicked she had been to call her best, her kindest friend a cruel man—he who had been so good to her, who had given her—a friendless orphan outcast—a home, and wealth, and, above all, love. But now that was all over. Never could that happiness return. He could never love her any more. He would never, never forget that wicked speech. She must remain for ever in his mind as an ungrateful woman, and ingratitude is of all sins the least pardonable. She cried a great deal as she thought over her sin and its terrible consequences. Then she sought pardon where it never is denied, and penitent and trembling, she went down to the studio.

"Arthur," she said, in a tearful voice, "dear Arthur."

Bellingham did not turn; he was smoking his cigar and was absorbed in the *Sporting and Dramatic News*. No wonder he was not willing to meet her half way; no wonder his heart was hardened by her ingratitude.

"Oh!" she sobbed, throwing herself at his feet, "do hear me. Dear Arthur, do forgive me; I did not mean that wicked, ungrateful speech. My best friend, indeed I am not so ungrateful. Oh, try to love me again, Arthur; I am so sorry for it all from first to last. Dear Arthur, forgive me; tell me you love me again."

Her grief would have melted a harder heart.

"Yes, Deirdre," he said reprovingly, "I forgive you. There, there," he added more tenderly, touched by the sight of her sorrow. "There, dear, say no more about it. No,

love, of course I did not think you meant it; of course I love you, dear; and now, my love, don't cry any more about it; you won't be fit to be seen, and remember we have to go to Lady Vere de Vere's to-night. No, I shall think no more about it; only, dear, *do* try to control your ungovernable temper. I know, oh yes, I know you didn't mean it, but you may make both our lives wretched without meaning it, don't you know. Is that the second dinner bell? Well, I declare it is. Just run and bathe your face and we will dress afterwards."

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. AND MRS. BELLINGHAM did not often indulge in quarrels, but any little disagreement they had invariably ended in a scene of dramatic penitence on the wife's part and noble forgiveness on the side of the husband, and each of these scenes added to Bellingham's sense of being an illused and magnanimous personage. Therefore it is not wonderful that their home life became less and less cordial and happy. Perhaps both were a little to blame for this state of things, but far more blamable was fate for bringing together two people so absolutely different in character, disposition, thoughts, and interests.

Bellingham was soon forced to own to himself that his marriage was a disappointment. He missed the freedom of his bachelor days, and the domestic joys that he had hoped would more than replace his old amusements palled as quickly as they had done in Andreina's time. He was annoyed, too, that his wife had not more social success; many a girl with half her beauty was more admired. And yet he could not wonder that it was so, for certainly Deirdrè was sometimes a little heavy on hand. He felt a grim satisfaction in watching the speed with which admiring swains deserted her for less lovely but more conversational sirens. "She is divinely beautiful," he overheard young Dawn say on one occasion; "I could sit and look at her all day—provided I had somebody to talk to." And her other accomplishments, Bellingham found, were much on a par with her conversational attainments. She could not ride, she could not dance, she could not play tennis. She judged works of art by their subject and their finish;

she could not see whether a thing was or was not in drawing; her taste in colour was rudimentary. She sang prettily, that was all.

In society, that is to say Arthur's "society," she was a most unsympathetic companion. She knew nothing of science, nothing of art. She had a most embarrassing ideal of truth and purity; she blushed so deeply if Arthur told a fib, that every one saw he was romancing. She blushed equally deeply if any one made a light remark on questions of morality or religion. In no way was she diplomatic or a woman of the world. With those she liked she was pleasant enough, if the truth pleased them; but often she liked the most insignificant people, while she would be woefully stiff and dull to the very people Bellingham wished her to get on with.

The set he moved in was rather notoriously light-minded and frivolous, and two-thirds of his friends shocked and grieved his wife by their loose way of speaking of virtue and religion. And Deirdre's religion was not of the comfortable kind that hears its faith outraged without resentment. Honest doubt or sober infidelity she would have prayed over with love and pity, but light-mindedness disgusted her. "I don't ask them to agree with us, Arthur" (at that time she still persisted in treating her husband as a light of the Church) "all I ask is that they should treat serious things seriously. They would think it very bad taste if I spoke irreverently of Homer and Michelangelo; and yet our faith is much more to us—and to them, too, if they only knew it—than any genius can be."

Arthur doubted whether a joke at Homer's expense would be so extremely painful to many of his friends as his wife imagined, but he kept these doubts to himself. He was finding out that it was best not to argue with her; he and she looked at life so differently. On the whole, Bellingham thought that marriage had not brought him quite all he had hoped from it.

As for Deirdre, she had blinded herself as long as she could, but she awoke soon to the fundamental want of sympathy between herself and her husband. Bellingham's teaching had little effect on her; nay, the social falsehoods and hypocrisies of which he was constantly guilty made her more uncompromisingly truthful than before. Such pettiness and want of candour were, to her, beneath contempt; before all things she abhorred a lie, and indifference to truth was one of Bellingham's weak points—that is to say, indifference to truth on minor matters; between truth and courtesy he would not hesitate an instant. Poor truth made but a light weight in the balance.

An instance of this occurred a few weeks after their marriage, when young Dawn sent Bellingham a copy of some poems he had just published. Neither Arthur nor Deirdre were much given to poetry, so Dawn's book lay cut, but unread, on their drawing-room table. A short time afterwards they met the poet at an "at home." Deirdre looked a little shy.

"It was kind of you to send us your book," she said.

"Now own, Mrs. Bellingham," cried the young man, "that neither you nor Bellingham have looked at it."

"No," said the lady, blushing, "we have not. You see, we do not read poetry; indeed, we do not read much of anything."

Just then Bellingham came up. "Dawn," he cried, enthusiastically, "my dear fellow—so much obliged for your delightful book—charming! charming! The wife and I have spent many a pleasant hour over it. That, er—that, er—prayer to Persephone surpasses anything of Shelley's."

Dawn looked at Mrs. Bellingham, but he could only see her bonnet; she was busy with her watch-chain, which had become disarranged. He made some remark to Bellingham and then moved away.

"Poor Dawn," said the noted critic Findfault, "he has made a sad fool of himself with that book."

Bellingham nodded. "Pity he can find nothing better to do with his money than publish such rubbish," he replied; but just then he turned his head and encountered the eyes of his wife. He would have given a great deal to believe she had not heard him; still there could be no doubt of the expression of scorn upon her face. What a lecture she would read him on the way home! Well, he would plead guilty at once, for he did feel rather ashamed of himself; that second speech had been so needlessly untruthful and unkind.

But, to his astonishment, Deirdrè did not so much as allude to the episode of Dawn's book, and this was the more surprising as she was rather addicted to delivering little sermons to him in those early days of their marriage, when she still cherished hopes of prevailing on him to be very devout. As Rose expressed it, "He must, of course, be a Catholic, because he had never been anything else," but this recusancy was about the extent of his devotion. When he was ill, or for any other reason dissatisfied with this world, he believed in a better. A sublime landscape, a starlight night, or a raging sea, raised in his mind some vague religious emotions, some involuntary homage to the Creator of such beauty; therefore he maintained that he felt more religious in the open air than in church, and made this an excuse for never assisting at mass.

Deirdrè did not see any inconsistency in going to church and feeling devotional out of doors; and as Arthur's reformation had been one reason for her acceptance of him, she tried to convert him to her view, and two consecutive Sundays she bore him off in triumph. But as the man in his heart was no more a Catholic than a Hindoo, the service seemed to him a stupid mummary, the sermon dreary, and the whole thing as dull a way of passing a morning as he could imagine; and on the third Sunday Deirdrè was forced to go to church alone. It was a terrible disappointment to the poor girl, who had hoped to induce him to accompany her to mass,

not only on Sundays but on week days also. He had seemed so religious before his marriage that she could not understand his sudden indifference, his decided unwillingness to walk in that narrow, thorny path which he had represented himself as being so anxious to tread if only he had someone to accompany and sustain him on his road. But until the affair of Dawn's book it had never occurred to her that Arthur was insincere; worldly and self-indulgent he had told her he was, and had begged her to pull him out of the ditch. Now, however, she suspected that he had merely used his spiritual needs as a bait to tempt her to become his wife, though why he should have been so anxious to marry her was still a mystery.

The Dawn affair did not long remain the only blot on Bellingham's truthfulness, for besides little social prevarications that the wife tried to make light of he was soon guilty of a second grave misdemeanour. On the mornings when he had no model he employed himself in painting the head of his wife, and often even when he was expecting a sitter he made her pose to him for an hour or so after breakfast. Altogether he spent an immense deal of time and trouble over that "sketch." But at length it was completed, and a very *chic*, clever bit of painting it was; a good likeness too, with a sort of superficial resemblance; but for all its *chic* appearance it was a careful bit of work, and there was no sense in Arthur showing it to everyone as "a little thing of my wife I knocked off the other day." Arthur repeated this phrase several times without Deirdrè making any remonstrance; he was hardly conscious himself that it was in intention, if not in absolute wording, an untruth.

When first Deirdrè discovered her husband's untruthfulness she was so overcome by contempt for this fault that she resolved to make no remonstrance; but she did not long maintain that resolution. She soon perceived how easy it must be for a society man like Arthur to slip into untruthfulness, and how unconscious he must be of so unmanly a failing;

he had been so good, so generous to her, that the least she could do was to warn and counsel him when she saw him slipping into sin, so after his next exhibition of "the little thing he had knocked off of his wife," she said to him—

"Arthur, dear, don't you think that the expression 'knocked off' gives rather a wrong impression of that picture?"

"In what way?" said Bellingham. "'Knocked off,' you know, doesn't imply that I did it with a hammer or a pair of boxing-gloves."

"No," said she, laughing, "I know that. I meant that it rather implied it was something done without trouble—at one sitting."

Bellingham went rather red. "You mean that I have been telling lies about it."

The girl went up to him, and sitting by him laid her hands upon his, and looked lovingly into his face. "One could hardly call it a lie, even had you wished to imply that you painted it at once. I only thought that without knowing it you had—you had——"

"Well, at any rate, Deirdre, there is no fear of my being unconscious of my faults. Have you none of your own that you keep such a look-out for mine?"

"Oh, Arthur! I didn't mean to vex you. Of course I know I have many more than you, though no doubt I often sin without knowing it; but when I do wrong and you notice it, I wish, dear, you would tell me. You see I tell you because you said before we were married that it was for that that you wished to marry me."

Bellingham looked tenderly at the sweet girlish face, so charming in its earnestness; he pinched his wife's chin and said, "So you think I wanted you as a 'discipline.'"

"No," said the girl, sturdily, "but you did tell me, dear, that you wanted me to—to help you to be good."

"And am I not good?"

"To me very—so good that I want you to be perfect."

"My dear, suppose I don't want to be perfect."

"Arthur! It grieves me to hear you talk like that. Talk as you used to do, seriously."

"Did I ever say I wanted to be perfect?"

"Yes, often; you must remember it."

"Well, my dear, I think a perfect man would be very unfitted to society."

"Then," said the girl, "I would give up society."

"And bread and cheese?"

"You might paint and not go into society."

By this time Bellingham had had enough of sermonising. "My little girl," he said gently, "be as good as you like; I will bear with your fast-days and your early services, but on the other hand you must bear with my worldliness. You are a very good little girl, but don't you think it's a little presumptuous of eighteen to lecture forty?"

"Yes, I do, Arthur, I told you that when you said I could lead you, but you said——"

"I said I suppose—like many another man—what I thought would please my little lady——"

"Then you didn't mean it?"

"Well," said he, kissing her and smiling, "not exactly."

The girl sprang up and ran out of the room. She was sobbing as she went, but she did not wish her husband to see that she was crying. Her dream was over; she felt at once tricked and humiliated. How foolish she had been to believe that she could influence a man of Arthur's age and experience; how presumptuous, how vain. And he had seen at once through her self-righteous vanity. He had fallen in love with her face, and seeing her to be a vain, self-confident girl, had traded on her conceit. She hated herself for her presumption, but she felt that Arthur had been cruel and false to pretend that he was religious; to tell her that she could help him; he had, as he himself would express it, "made a fool of her." She felt bitter both against herself and against him. It was perhaps inevitable that she should wrong Bellingham

in this way. She could not understand his shallow changing nature; she could not imagine a man so fickle that in February he could sincerely believe he wished to be guided to orthodoxy, and that by the self-same woman to whom three months later he could declare with equal sincerity that she was a fool ever to have thought she could influence him, and that, moreover, he had no wish to be influenced.

After this scene Deirdrè made no more efforts at guiding her husband. She prayed for him almost without ceasing, but she no longer entreated him to go with her to mass, nor did she protest against his eating meat on fast-days; his social falsehoods he no longer told in fear of subsequent upbraidings.

But Bellingham did not keep his share of the compact; he did not let his wife "be as good as she liked;" he did not "bear with her fast-days and early services." It was by this time the height of the season, and the Bellinghams were out almost every night of the week. Under the circumstances it certainly was a little trying for Arthur to be awoke soon after seven by the sound of his wife stealthily dressing to go to eight o'clock mass.

"Is that what you call religion?" he said, with not unnatural crossness; "I call it selfishness. I did not get to bed till four o'clock, and you, for some fad of your own, must needs wake me at seven. It is all very well for you who can sleep half the day away, but I have to earn the money you spend."

After this lamentation had been made on two mornings Deirdrè ceased to go to mass except on holy days, and then at the latest possible hour. She had hoped on her marriage to be able to devote much of her time to good works, and it was no small disappointment to her to find that she must make no engagement for the mornings, as Arthur constantly required her for a model; nor for the afternoon, as nothing must interfere with her "social duties." These social duties she disliked immensely; she had nothing in common with the

mass of Arthur's friends; she had nothing to say to them, nor they to her.

But Bellingham was devoted to society, and imagined that it only needed knowledge of the world and *savoir faire* to make his wife as fond of it as he was himself. Her convent training, he thought, had been much against her, but she was still young enough to overcome that disadvantage. Mixing with the world would soon give her facility in conversation and also manner. Dancing he took no small pains to teach her, and her beauty was now enhanced by handsome and becoming dresses made from his designs. In that, at least, her husband was not disappointed; all the world could recognise the loveliness of that gentle face now that it surmounted silk and velvet. Despite lack of style and conversational deficiencies, Mrs. Bellingham was the belle of the season. When she entered a room all eyes were upon her, and a murmur of admiration gratified her husband's ear. Yet Bellingham was disappointed, and before two months were over was beginning to tire of the woman to whom he had made such ardent love.

But as yet this disappointment was unconfessed even to his own heart. Deirdrè alone suspected that she was not so dear to him as she had been three months ago. None of his friends guessed at this state of affairs. That he who was a thorough man of the world should be able to deceive people in this matter was not surprising, but of all those who knew Mrs. Bellingham only Rose suspected that her marriage was not a happy one, and even Rose believed that the wife alone was disappointed, and that Arthur was still as happy as on his honeymoon. He talked much of his wife, and always with most loverlike ardour; and if Deirdrè spoke of her husband and of her married life to none, that might be because she was "so very reserved." Only Rose feared that she was reserved simply because she had nothing pleasant to say, and Mrs. Butler's comments on the girl's good fortune elicited no response.

Deirdre's good fortune was quite one of the topics of the season in the Butlers' set, and the full extent of the girl's social rise became very soon known, for it was not in the Butler nature to keep so charming a bit of gossip quiet. Arthur's passion was pronounced most romantic, and poor Mrs. Stanley was a good deal commiserated in having so plebeian a sister-in-law thrust upon her. Still Mr. Bellingham's fancy was quite comprehensible; the girl really was a great beauty, and what will not men do for beauty? And Miss Butler says she is as good as she is beautiful. Under these circumstances numbers of ladies felt it their duty to call on the young bride. Their verdict on that lady was fairly unanimous: they thought her very dull, not to say stupid, but wonderfully ladylike. They were very surprised that a girl whose father had been a bailiff could be so ladylike, even though since the age of eight she had associated solely with ladies much better born than those who were kind enough to patronise the poor young thing.

Mrs. Stanley alone still maintained that the girl was vulgar and underbred; that she had caught Arthur by dint of persistent angling, and that her indecision about accepting him had been simply a lure.

"Depend upon it," she said to her friends, "she never had the slightest intention of refusing him, but she was clever enough to see that by pretending indifference she would draw him on. Not that she ever cared a straw for him; what she wanted was a good home and grand clothes; one can see that by the things she has made him buy for her. I never see her but she has on a new and beautiful dress. Poor Arthur! When he works so hard it does seem dreadful that he should have married such a worldly, extravagant woman."

"But, surely, Mrs. Bellingham is very religious?"

"All a pretence, my dear, all a pretence; anything that would be at all a self-denial—early services, district visiting—she discards. Her piety takes the comfortable form of eating fish on Fridays. Not that I disapprove of abstinence,

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a woman could have been happy with him, but Deirdrè was not of them. Few men could have been happy with Deirdrè, and Arthur was not one of these. Still he was man of the world enough to know that many ill-assorted marriages do in the end turn out pretty well. At eighteen the character is not irrevocably formed; with training here and pruning there, Bellingham thought that in time even Deirdrè might be turned into a woman of fashion and that, though the marriage had been a mistake, they might in the end rub along comfortably enough. So keeping his disappointment to himself, and hiding even from his wife that he was not happy, he set himself the task of snipping and clipping her unconventionality into a shape that would enable her to go through life without earning for herself the dreaded name of an eccentric woman.

CHAPTER IX.

To model successfully, an artist must have some sort of idea of the material in which he is working, and Bellingham had absolutely no knowledge of his wife's nature. He set to work too quickly, and he found that the material was unyielding to his touch. Among other commissions he had one to paint a full-length figure of Truth, and the head of this he resolved to paint from his wife. She was already accustomed to sit to him, for he often used her as a model for drapery, even when he did not require her face. She was a good sitter, and always willing to make herself useful to her husband in this way, for though she found it irksome to remain long in one position, she enjoyed doing him this little service, and was glad, too, that he should prefer her to a hired model. So she was pleased when he told her that she was to pose for his Truth.

He sketched in the figure one day when she had been standing in a classic dress for another picture, and then he painted the head. That was in June, and she heard no more of the Truth for two or three weeks, he being busy portrait painting, while she, too, was much occupied in sitting for the accessories. One morning, when she was posing for the drapery of a cloak, the studio bell rang, and two names, quite unknown to Deirdre, were shouted up the tube.

"Stay where you are, dear," said Bellingham. "I don't want these fellows to stop, and if you are here they will see they are interrupting us;" and then the door opened, and Bellingham introduced two young men to his wife. They did not take Mrs. Bellingham's presence for a hint that they were

not wanted, and Arthur, who was nothing if not courteous, began showing them his pictures.

"That's not finished yet, but it's to be a figure of Truth. Deirdrè, love, you must give me another sitting for the head."

"Yes, I see the head's not finished yet," said one of the men critically; "but it's nice, very nice indeed, though at present the torso is the best bit of painting. I think that torso, Bellingham, is about as fine as anything you have done; but surely there is something queer about that left thigh—no foreshortening could make it look as thick as that."

"Oh yes, my dear fellow," began Bellingham; and then he heard the rustle of his wife's dress behind him. How would she take it? For a moment he felt an awful qualm for fear she should upbraid him then and there before those men.

The words torso and thigh had aroused her suspicion. She went to where the canvas stood, and there, in place of the draped charcoal figure for which she had stood, was a nearly finished nude figure, but with her face to it. Her first feeling was one of shame—of shame as overwhelming as though it had been herself who stood there for all men to see her nakedness; then she felt that she had been outraged and insulted. She turned quietly and, to Arthur's infinite relief, left the room without a word. Well, perhaps she would have recovered her temper by the time he joined her, and it was ridiculous of her to make a bother about a thing like that, for anyone could see that the figure was not hers. But to Deirdrè it was a much more serious offence. She was ignorant of art, sceptical about its importance in the world. It seemed to her terrible that any woman should consent to stand naked before a man, terrible that her husband should allow any woman so to appear before him. That such things were painted in the nineteenth century she had never imagined till she went to the Salon on her wedding tour, and even then she had not realised that they were not evolved from the artists' imagination. Of course she had soon found out that Arthur, like every other figure painter, employed nude models; she knew that he saw

no harm in it, for they had more than once discussed the subject, and he knew how warmly she disapproved of it. She had been a little hurt when he had refused to promise her never again to draw from the nude; but that he, knowing her feeling on the subject, should put her face above a naked figure was an insult past forgiveness. It was the last of a series of disillusionings, the first of their quarrels in which the wife felt herself to be wholly and entirely in the right.

She went up to her bedroom and sat down on the window-seat, to brood over her grievance. She and Arthur were to go that afternoon to a garden party at Putney, and ill-suited as was her mood for gaiety, she knew she should have to go. Still, if she began to dress when Arthur came up that would be time enough. Till then she was free to think over her wrongs. She resolved, as she thought the matter over, to say nothing about the offence; words could not atone for an injury like that. She would keep her anger to herself; her cold and distant demeanour alone should protest against this insult. Speaking never did any good; it always ended in her seeming to be in the wrong and having to beg Arthur's forgiveness. This time it could not end like that, but she was too deeply wounded to upbraid her husband. Just at that moment she heard him go into the dressing-room, and then it occurred to her that it would be more simple and candid to tell him how she felt about the picture. After all, it was foolish to drift apart when a few words might set all right.

"Arthur," she said, opening the dressing-room door.

"Well, my dear?"

"Arthur, I am greatly offended with you."

"Well, my dear, you always are; I never met with such a woman for being offended. I should hardly know you if you were in a good temper," replied the husband in an amiable voice, and placidly brushing his hair.

"Oh," cried the girl, "that is unjust! and I think now, Arthur, that I have real cause for offence."

"Well, you always do think that, you know; you always

are in the right, ain't you? However, what's the matter this time, old woman?"

"It's about that figure—that Truth," said Deirdre, dolefully wondering how it was that Arthur had again contrived to make her seem in the wrong.

"The Truth? Why, what's wrong about that? She's not handsome enough, eh, Deirdre?"

"I don't care whether she's handsome or not," said the poor girl, with a sound of tears in her voice. "Oh, Arthur, how could you put my face to such a figure!"

"Well, my dear, I thought it a most subtle bit of flattery to immortalise you as Truth, and you appeared to like it the other day. However, it seems there is no pleasing you woman-kind."

"It is not a question of Truth at all, and you know it, Arthur," cried Deirdre, indignantly.

"Well, then, what is the question?" he said angrily. "Out with it, girl, for I'm sick of this everlasting nagging."

"You know as well as I do why I am angry. You know how I feel about those naked women, and how I hate to see the pictures and to think how they are painted. You know, Arthur, that to me the whole thing is wicked and indecent."

"Oh, my dear girl——"

"I am not asking you to agree with me, Arthur; but you know how I feel, and however silly you think my views, you should not have put my face on—on a naked figure." By this time Mrs. Bellingham was very near to tears.

"My good girl, what can it matter?" cried Arthur, reassuringly, "No one who does not know you will know whose face it is, and no one who has ever set eyes on you can believe that figure to be Mrs. Arthur Bellingham *au naturel*."

Deirdre went back to her room and shut the door to prevent any continuation of the conversation. She began to realise that to remonstrate with one's husband is a mistake. She knew she was in the right, yet somehow Arthur had contrived to put her so entirely in the wrong that a single kind word

from him would have brought her to the state of penitence which usually ended their quarrels. Were all husbands like that, or was hers, as every one said, an exceptionally good one? The fault must lie with her, and yet she could not think in this instance that she had been unduly angry. Notwithstanding these agitating thoughts she was dressed sooner than her husband, and when he came down he found her, as he liked to do, ready and waiting. But there was no attempt at peacemaking in her manner; in place of its usual pleading expression her mouth wore a look of determination, and there was a little colour in her clear pale cheeks. By these signs Bellingham knew she was still angry. That anger he thought most unfounded, and he felt himself deeply aggrieved. He had done so much for the girl, that her resentment seemed like ingratitude; so both being equally offended, there seemed little chance of a reconciliation.

A drive in a comfortable little Victoria on a bright summer afternoon ought to be enjoyable to a newly married couple; but both Bellingham and his wife sat in moody silence until they neared the house to which they were invited. Then he, by way of pouring oil on the troubled waters, said, "I hope, Deirdrè, for the sake of your reputation, that you will not let these people see what a devil of a temper you are in."

"I shall do my best," replied Deirdrè, mournfully; "besides, Arthur, I don't feel cross."

"Oh no, of course not. You never do. You're an angel, only your beast of a husband doesn't see it. That's the line, isn't it?"

This conciliatory speech occupied him till they reached the front door; so that his wife had no time to retort, but she certainly did look rather tragic for a bride at an afternoon party. However, melancholy was supposed to be her chief fascination, and many suspected it to be simply a manner adopted to suit the style of her face.

"She would be nothing," Alex Campbell said to Rose, "if she did not look as though she were going to be hanged in half an hour."

The rooms were already crowded when the Bellinghams arrived. The Butlers were there and a number of other people whom the Bellinghams knew; also many known to the husband but not to the wife. Deirdrè saw Rose in a corner, flirting as usual with Captain Campbell; but she had no chance of doing anything beyond nodding to her friend, for Arthur was constantly taking her and presenting her to Lady This and Lady That, who wished to make her acquaintance (Bellingham had rather a weakness for titles). There were also a number of young men brought up to her and introduced. To everyone she said the same thing—what a lovely day it was, and how pretty the garden looked through the window, and that, thank you, she would rather stay where she was. She was in her dullest mood, and miserably conscious of her dulness.

After a time she saw Bellingham go up to a young man who was making a triumphant tour of the room. He seemed to know and to be delighted to see everybody, and everybody appeared quite unusually pleased to see him. Deirdrè making her stupid remark about the garden, thought how pleasant it must be to be like that, so fresh and bright and handsome. He had evidently plenty to say for himself, and gesticulated a good deal in saying it. Altogether he was quite a noticeable personage. Had Mrs. Bellingham chanced to look at Rose, she would have seen that this young man was either very pleasing or very objectionable to her friend, but Deirdrè was watching her husband. He, like everybody else, was delighted to see this captivating youth, and soon brought him up to Deirdrè. "My dear, Mr. Hanlon wants to be introduced to you," and then remembering his wife's limited conversational powers, he added, "Mr. Hanlon has just come back from Italy."

"Oh," said Deirdrè, "I have often heard you talk of Mr.

Hanlon," and then turning to the young man, she added, "Arthur is illustrating your book, is he not?"

"Well, since you are so kind as to put it that way, he is, Mrs. Bellingham, though most people would say that I am writing a tale to suit Bellingham's illustrations."

Then Mr. Hanlon sat down at Mrs. Bellingham's side, and the husband left him to his fate. As he walked away Bellingham imagined his wife's remarks about the beautiful day, the pretty garden, and then the solemn silence and Hanlon's ignominious flight; but, to his amazement, the young man did not fly from Deirdrè so quickly as was usual with her admirers. Once, twice, three times when he looked round they were still together. It must be that Hanlon was such a fellow for talking that he could find enough to say for both. Again Bellingham looked round, and this time both Hanlon and Deirdrè had disappeared. He went to the window and saw his wife's dress among the distant roses. What a mercy it must be to a man like Hanlon to find such a silent listener.

The rooms were now thinning. Bellingham looked at his watch; it was time to be going home, for he and his wife were to dine out and to go to a dance afterwards. He went into the garden; Hanlon's brogue, he said to himself, would soon tell him where to seek the pair. But the voice that revealed to him where his wife was was not Hanlon's, but a better-known one that had more of a French than an Irish intonation—a voice that now sounded very cheerful, and was broken by little bursts of childlike merry laughter, to which Hanlon's deeper note made an agreeable second. Bellingham felt relieved to find that his wife had so evidently recovered her temper. A turn in the path brought the young people into sight. They were sitting on a bench, Hanlon leaning forward, his chin on his hand and his elbow on his knee, listening intently to some tale that Deirdrè was telling. Evidently the story was very amusing, for Mrs. Bellingham was chuckling with that infantine mirth of hers so foreign to

her usual grave mood, so charmingly at variance with her tragic face. Hanlon, too, was showing wonderful rows of teeth; but that was not surprising, he was such a fellow for smiling.

"What is the joke?" asked Bellingham, and then without waiting for an answer he said it was time to be going home. "By the way, Hanlon," he continued, "I want to have a talk with you about that third volume. Come on Sunday."

"We are going to Richmond, Arthur," put in his wife.

"And so am I," said Hanlon with his brilliant smile.

"I had forgotten it," said Bellingham, pulling out his notebook. "We are going on Kilhorse's drag."

"Well, that is fortunate," cried Hanlon; "I am going on it too."

"No, really? I didn't know you knew Kilhorse. Saturday—let me see. Ah, Lady Mountash leaves me at one. Come to lunch at half-past, will you, Hanlon? You can go to the house-door, you know, and ask for the wife, and we can have a talk and a cigar afterwards. Good-bye."

Bellingham made no allusion to the disagreement of the early afternoon as he drove home. Deirdre having recovered her temper was pardoned, and he was pleased with her for showing more conversational resource than usual. In time she would grow like other people, for after all she was really young, and in social experience younger even than her years. He told himself he must have patience with her; she was already improved in appearance, and was getting to dance quite prettily; manner would, no doubt, come in time. All the way home he was most amiable, speculating kindly on the extraordinary circumstance of Hanlon's acquaintance with Lord Kilhorse, and wondering how he got to know such good people.

His amiability was so completely restored that it bore the severe test of a very dull dinner party and a badly-cooked dinner. "If the dance is as dull as the dinner was we will go home in an hour," said he as they drove to the ball. But

Deirdrè knew that her husband would not find a dance dull, and smilingly told him so, for he was an indefatigable dancer. He liked to have a good partner, but he always danced at least twice with his wife. It was simply a lesson for Deirdrè; her husband coached her all the time. "One, two, three—one, two, three—not such long steps. One, two, three—keep closer to me. One, two, three—better. One, two, three—" and then when the girl was too giddy to stand, he would say consolingly, "Never mind, that was much better; you'll soon get into it."

But Mrs. Bellingham could not see that there was any need for getting into it. The movement made her terribly sick and giddy, and gave her a racking headache next day. She was also too prudish to like the idea of it, and under no circumstances was she fond of violent exercise. Still, not to dance is considered eccentric, and eccentricity was a thing Bellingham could not endure. At last the valse was over, but a whole circle of young men formed round the bride, begging to "have the pleasure." Under her husband's eye she dared make no excuses, so in a moment her card was filled up, Hanlon having secured two valeses. He, like Bellingham, was never tired of dancing, and when Deirdrè had been whirled round by two or three youths Hanlon came up bright and eager—

"I think this is our dance," said he.

"Oh!" cried she in dismay, "and I have only this very instant sat down; I am so giddy."

"Then," said Hanlon, "shall we not dance it? Come and have an ice, and let us sit in a cooler place."

The cooler place was so refreshing that the young people sat there for half an hour quite oblivious of their partners. There was something about Hanlon that made Deirdrè feel a friendship for him at once, and Deirdrè, curiously enough, inspired the young man with the same sense of long-standing friendship. It was, they agreed, a most singular thing, and Bellingham also, when they informed him of the

fact thought it curious. He was glad that his wife liked Hanlon, for as a rule she did not get on well with his friends, with whom for the most part she had nothing in common. But between herself and Michael Hanlon there was at least one bond of sympathy—they were both extremely religious.

The young man was of a less ascetic disposition than the girl, and when he prayed to have his purgatory on earth he did it with the unconscious reservation that he would prefer no purgatory at all; and though he looked on life, at any rate in theory, as a fleeting pilgrimage, he was none the less anxious to brighten his journey by gathering any flowers that he chanced to see upon his thorny path; and Hanlon was one of those lucky people who are capable of finding a profusion of flowers where less favoured natures see only stones and brambles. But none the less he was devout; he kept his fast-days and his days of abstinence among people who thought these old-fashioned notions simply ridiculous; and no matter how late he was up overnight, he never failed to attend mass on days of devotion. Many a morning when Deirdrè went to her solitary prayers, she saw the figure of Michael Hanlon among the scanty congregation. To the lonely girl this was no slight bond.

Except Rose Butler, Hanlon was the only person she knew in London of her own way of thinking, and Rose was only spasmodically devout—not at all the sort of person on whom one could rely for sympathy. But Hanlon could sympathise with the poor convent-bred girl thus suddenly thrown into the midst of a frivolous society. He knew how many things must jar upon her, and at the same time the almost overwhelming temptations there were to be led away, the difficulty of making concessions in matters that are not precisely matters of principle, and of refusing to concede in matters that are. From many things Deirdrè said to him he saw that her way through the world was not a very smooth one, but he did not suspect that Bellingham added to her difficulties. He was as far as anyone else from suspecting

that the marriage was not a success, for Bellingham always spoke of his wife with the warmest affection ; and if Deirdre never mentioned her husband, it was because a beautiful pure nature such as her's would not speak to outsiders of the sacred happiness of home. What exquisite reserve—reserve blended with kindly interest. How good she was, how sympathetic. How kindly she listened to all his confidences ; how purely she reserved her own for her husband's ears.

But Mrs. Bellingham told her new friend many things that, though they were not confidences, her husband thought she would have done well to keep to herself. For instance, Michael soon heard that she had been governess to Kate and Emily, and as Bellingham had implied to Hanlon that his wife was a lady of position, he felt a little indignant with the girl for her unnecessary candour. Besides, if she told of this, how much more might she not tell ? Bellingham did not love to remember that his wife was a bailiff's daughter, and had been educated by the charity of her father's master.

"My dear," he said, after Deirdre had made the governess revelation, and when Hanlon had departed, "my dear, I don't think you need tell young Hanlon all your private affairs."

"Of course not, Arthur ; whatever do you mean ?"

"Only, my dear, that you need not have said you were the Butlers' governess."

"But why not ?"

"Because it is as well that people should not know these things, my little girl ; there is no harm, of course, in your story, Deirdre, but it is not very pleasant for me to have it known that my wife was a charity child."

"Arthur !" she exclaimed indignantly.

"Well, my dear, it is the truth ; or at least that is what people will say if you tell them that——"

"Are all governesses charity girls ?"

"You should let me finish, my impetuous little maid," said Arthur, stroking her hair. "You don't suppose, do you, that Butler really thought you fit to teach his children ?"

"Most certainly I do."

"Oh, happy vanity of youth! It would be too unkind to disturb my little maid's conceit."

"Indeed it would not, Arthur. I should like you to finish."

"Well, my dear, what I have said does not seem to have increased your amiability. Look in the glass, madam; did you ever see such a little virago?"

"Don't, Arthur dear, don't, pray. I want to know what you mean. Why should not Mr. Butler think me fit to teach Kate and Emily?"

"Because," said Arthur, smiling at the girl's earnestness—"because my little girl was herself so very ignorant."

The girl started back as though she had been struck; she did not speak, but a look of mingled pain and indignation came into her face.

"Of course," continued Bellingham, sweetly, "I don't mean to say you do not come up to the Bonsecours standard of wisdom, only that the Bonsecours standard is not high enough to satisfy Londoners. Butler told me himself that he did not know what to do with you. Having taken to you, he felt obliged to start you in life, but he found it impossible to get a situation for a Roman Catholic, so he took you for a time himself. I really can't see anything to be so cut up about, my girl. Why is it more humiliation to have been kept for—let me see, six months, wasn't it?—as governess out of charity, than for ten years as pupil? There's nothing to cry about, child. Butler having taken you up was bound to start you in life."

"He might have left me where I was," said Deirdrè with tearful indignation.

"But, my dear, you told me they wouldn't have you because you weren't a lady, or something of that kind."

"That's true," said Mrs. Bellingham, sadly, and then she went and knelt by her husband's chair. "My poor Arthur," she said, laying her hand on his, "and you were very sorry for me?"

"Who would not have been?" he exclaimed, kissing her.

"And for pity you married me? That was noble of you, Arthur."

"I don't suppose I should have married an ugly girl from pity, Deirdrè," he replied magnanimously.

Deirdrè sighed. To this unreasonable young woman it was even more humiliating to have been married for her beauty than from pity.

"So you see, old woman, that when you say you were the Butlers' governess it gives rather a wrong impression."

"I can't agree with you there, Arthur. To say I was Mr. Butler's ward gives a still false impression."

"But you are his ward!" said Bellingham, with a glare that was meant to put an end to the discussion.

"And I was his governess."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, don't nag, Deirdrè! You are a regular woman—nag, nag, nag till one is weary of your everlasting harping on one string. It is my desire"—here Bellingham glared again—"my desire that in future you tell no one that you were either a charity child or a governess."

"It will be quite unnecessary, for you may be sure the Butlers have told people long ago."

Bellingham sighed. Somehow that had never occurred to him before. "I suspect you are right there," he said bitterly; "but I can't understand your caring to boast of it," and he rose and left the room.

No one with much experience of young ladies in their teens needs to be told that the moment her husband closed the door Mrs. Bellingham burst into tears. The motive of the tears would vary, of course, with the character of the lady. Mrs. Bellingham wept because she felt that she had annoyed her husband, but even more because she had been humbled to the very dust. The knowledge that her husband had married her from pity should have increased her gratitude towards him, but the obligation had been too great, and the poor girl only felt resentful and oppressed. In truth she had no cause

for gratitude. Bellingham had married her solely and simply to please himself, but he was ungenerous enough to lay claim to a virtue he possessed not; and untruthful though Deirdrè knew him to be, she did not suspect that he would deceive her in so important a matter.

The weight of obligation increased the barrier that was growing between these two people. It added to their constraint, and consequently to Bellingham's desire of passing as few hours as possible alone with his wife. By this time the season was nearly over. Afternoons and evenings came for which the Bellinghams had no engagement, and Arthur would ask some bachelor friend in to break the *tête-à-tête*. The most frequent of these visitors was Hanlon; he was always so cheerful and merry that, sad to say, both husband and wife found the evenings much pleasanter with him than without him, and he soon became so intimate as to be absolutely no constraint. He would read, or sing, or smoke in the studio, just as Bellingham wished; and Mr. Michael's evenings, that used to be so profitably employed in writing or studying, were now spent for the most part with the Bellinghams.

He was as painfully candid as Deirdrè, and Bellingham sometimes winced when Hanlon gave comic descriptions of the various occasions on which he had been so hungry that he had pawned his watch, or even his greatcoat. Bellingham had quite forgotten his student days; besides, he had always been able to write home for supplies. But it was patent that Hanlon could not write home for money, for his father, he said, had a shop in Limerick—a shop whose chief merit seemed to consist of the picturesque locality wherein it was situated. The Shannon, as seen from the Hanlons' windows was, Michael assured the Bellinghams, more impressive than the Tiber, the Arno, or any other river in the world. Deirdrè listened quietly to these rhapsodies about Ireland. Somehow when Hanlon spoke of it so lovingly it lost half its terrors, and Bellingham quite caught the young man's enthusiasm. "Why, not," he suggested as they smoked

their cigars, "why not do a series of Irish sketches for the Christmas Number of *London Bridge*." Hanlon of course caught at the idea, and the same evening the men wrote to the editor, proposing that Hanlon should write and Bellingham illustrate a description of the then famine-stricken districts of the West. "Don't mention it to the wife; it will be such a disappointment to her if it comes to nothing," said Bellingham, not very candidly; but he feared that if he said, "Don't mention it to the wife, she has such a horror of Ireland, that the bare thought of going there would make her ill," Hanlon might think it cruel to annoy her, and might refuse to have anything to do with the project. So Deirdre remained ignorant of the plans which the men were forming.

CHAPTER X.

THOSE who concerned themselves about the Bellingham's affairs already began to say that it was imprudent of Arthur to have young Hanlon so constantly at the house. Mrs. Stanley was the first to discover "poor Arthur's imprudence," and Rose Butler the next. But "poor Arthur" never concerned himself about prudence or imprudence, otherwise he would never have married a portionless girl like Deirdrè. He found his home dull and his wife bored him, whilst he was yet too recently married to be able to seek amusement away from home; and not only did his wife bore him, but he also bored his wife. They had not a thought, not an idea, in common. Their discussions ended so invariably in quarrels, that they feared embarking on any topic that was not wholly commonplace. Very dull and sad and dreary were the few evenings they passed alone together.

So what so natural as that the husband should bring a friend to dinner? Bellingham, now weary, always brought a friend, and the friend was nearly always Hanlon. For no one made the same difference in the house as Hanlon, everything seemed so bright and pleasant when he was there. Home lost its dull aspect, and the evenings were passed in harmless gaiety and merriment. But the greatest change was in Deirdrè; she was quite another woman when Hanlon was present, more tender and gentle to her husband, younger and more full of life. Certainly they had some very pleasant evenings in Melbury Road when Hanlon was there.

Yet it never occurred to Bellingham that there was danger

in these pleasant evenings, danger at least to Deirdre's peace of mind. Hanlon was a nice, open, intelligent, handsome lad—a lad with considerable literary talent; a pleasant young fellow to patronise, but no sort of equal; a provincial Irish boy with a Limerick brogue and an elementary education, but as a rival—it was impossible such a boy could be a rival. There was no comparison between a lad like Hanlon and himself; none, at any rate, by which he could suffer.

He forgot how often he had grieved his wife by his sneers at her religion, how he had wounded her by his confession that the seriousness he had affected before his marriage had been a blind, how he had insulted her by that affair of the nude figure, by that untrue assertion that he had married her from pity. He forgot how many minor offences he had committed against truth, how many more unkind words he had said to her than kind ones. What he remembered was that he, from his height, had stooped to her, and had raised her to the proud position of his wife and mistress of his house, and therefore was entitled to her love and gratitude. Her gratitude and her devotion he knew he had, and if not her love that was through no fault of his, but merely because, like so many women, she was incapable of love. If he could not inspire love, assuredly Hanlon could not; and, without thinking about it at all, Bellingham felt that Hanlon would never try to win the heart of his friend's wife. Besides, there was Kitty. Bellingham did not know that her name was Kitty, but he knew that there was a fair being who held Michael's heart, though she had never been asked to surrender her's in return. Deirdre, too, knew of Kitty—knew, in fact, that she was a Miss Kate Dolan, and that Mr. Hanlon suffered much from the existence of a certain young lawyer, who lived (lucky fellow!) in Limerick; for where in the world should one wish to live if not in Limerick or Galway?

The existence of Kitty—whom, by the way, Mr. Michael had not seen for two years—the existence of Kitty added much to the pleasant brotherly and sisterly friendship that grew up be-

tween these young people, for by the middle of August Mrs. Bellingham and Mr. Hanlon were quite sure they felt just that degree of relationship towards one another. Very likely, indeed, Mrs. Bellingham may have believed that had she ever had a brother she would have felt like that towards him, though I think Michael should have known that he did not feel at all towards his sisters as he did to Mrs. Bellingham; but then neither did he feel towards her as he did to Kitty. She was his ideal, as far above him as the stars; a creature sacred, like one's religion, nothing nearer or more intimate.

While this friendship was growing London was getting emptier every day. All Arthur's sitters were dispersed, and the objectionable Truth came again into the foreground. Deirdre had hoped that after that quarrel he would alter the face. But no; far from that, he made his wife sit to him again and again, till the beautiful sad face in the picture was the image of her who had sat for it with such a swelling and indignant heart.

For some reason that picture was never shown to Hanlon, and you may be sure Deirdre never mentioned it either to him or to anyone else. Twice a week she sat for the face, and four times a week someone else sat for the figure. It seemed to Deirdre while she was sitting for that picture that her cup of misery and degradation was full. But as yet the degradation was from without; nothing that Arthur could do could morally degrade her, and a time soon came when she looked back on those August days as days of purity and peace.

It seemed to Deirdre that they would never go out of town that summer, when one morning, quite at the end of the month, Arthur, after opening his letters, remarked—

"Well now, Deirdre, I suppose it's settled where we shall go."

"Oh, Arthur, where?" cried the girl eagerly. She was beginning to pine for the country.

"I didn't tell you before for fear it should come to nothing, but this is the agreement," he said, holding up a paper.

"Hanlon and I have an engagement to do a series of sketches together."

"You and Mr. Hanlon?"

"Yes; why not I and Hanlon?" asked Bellingham, rather crossly. He suspected from his wife's voice that she had some objection. "We are not going to leave you behind, old woman; we shall all go together."

"Where?"

"Oh, it's to be a sort of harrowing business—the Irish famine."

"Ireland," repeated Deirdre—she was very pale—"Oh, Arthur," she said faintly, "I can't go."

"What nonsense, Deirdre, there is nothing to be afraid of; they won't shoot us with Hanlon, you know. He belongs to the party of outrage; he is better protection than a regiment of soldiers."

"Oh, Arthur, leave me here. Dear Arthur, let me stop alone!" She rose from her seat and went and knelt by his side. "I will not be lonely, Arthur; let me stay here."

She was trembling; she could hardly control her voice, and how pale she was. "Arthur," she continued, "in heaven's name don't take me to Ireland!"

At Bellingham's age dramatic scenes are about the last thing one desires in home life. He had married for a quiet, peaceful home, and instead of quiet he seemed always at the edge of a volcano. "Oh," he cried impatiently, "for goodness' sake don't make a scene, Deirdre. You don't suppose I should take you into danger?"

"I was not thinking of danger," said his wife sadly.

"Then what on earth were you thinking of?"

"Oh, I can't tell you, Arthur. Arthur," she sobbed, taking his hands in hers, "don't make me go! Oh, I implore you, don't make me go!"

Bellingham sighed. "My dear girl," he remonstrated, "don't make a scene. Try not to give way to these nervous fancies, or you will end by not being able to do anything."

Now do try for once, just for a change, to be reasonable. What could become of you while I am away? You can't stop here because the paint has to be varnished; you can't quarter yourself on the Butlers because they are abroad."

"I might go to Bonsecours."

"Pish!" and Bellingham walked off to the studio.

For some time the girl remained where she had knelt to her husband without moving. She did not think, she scarcely felt, so stunned was she by the discovery she had just made. She had walked blindly to the edge of the precipice, and what an abyss of guilt and misery lay at her feet! How utterly she had deceived herself; she had sought out her little sins and left this all-pervading wickedness undiscovered. Worse, worse, not content with her own faults, she had judged Arthur's—had censured him for sins which now seemed as nothing compared to the wickedness of her own heart. Never, never, could she look her husband in the face again; never again hold up her head among honest women. And yet how could she have helped it? Until that morning she had had no suspicion. How long had that sin lain in her heart? How long had Michael been——? No! even for self-examination to frame that thought was sin. The awful knowledge had come suddenly upon her. "Hanlon and I have a commission." What a wild wicked hope that she might go too; what a suspense. And then when he said "We shall go together," she had known it all—known that to go anywhere with Michael would be the greatest happiness that earth could give. No! tempting voice that whispers, "And what harm?" No! self-deceit that says, "You love him as a brother." "I have done with you," she said aloud; "I have been blind, but I see now. I will see the truth, no matter how hideous it be."

She rose and went to her bedroom and locked the door; then throwing herself on the floor, sobbed bitterly. Blind! blind! how could she have been so blind? She should have known it long ago, when Michael's voice and Michael's name

made her heart beat. When she thus felt his presence she should instinctively have known that that was love. How vile she was, how tainted;—a sinner—the chief of sinners. “Lord, Lord have mercy on me a sinner, the very chief of sinners.” She hardly dared to pray for forgiveness, her crime was so black—was all the more hideous because she had led a religious life. She had had grace and the means of grace, and she had used them unto this end. Her scalding tears fell like rain; her heart was broken with her woe. Bitter repentance for a shameful sin. Unfaithful wife!

In Deirdre's moral code, the very thought of lawless love—no matter now unbidden—was a crime as black as pitch; and she knew now that Michael was dearer to her than all the world beside—dearer than Arthur, dearer than her honour, dearer than her hopes of heaven, dearer than all save the Master she had so earnestly, so erringly, loved and served throughout her short sad life. How had she sunk so low! “Ah me!” she moaned, “how am I fallen! Evils without number have surrounded me; my iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to see. They are multiplied above the hairs of my head; and my heart hath forsaken me.” How true it was—how manifold were her sins! She had not been able to see, and her heart had forsaken her. Her sorrow was very great as she repeated these verses; but after a time the next verse rose unbidden to her mind. “Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me; look down, O Lord, to help me.” Yes, even for such as she there was pardon. Pardon; yes, God will pardon; but there are sins so foul that even forgiveness does not wipe out the stain. Lament it as she would, she could not recall that guilty past. Those days of happiness, of unsuspected sin, were gone; she could not bring them back. All she could do was to repent; and repentance has three parts—sorrow, confession, and amendment. Now she must amend; she must at any cost place herself out of temptation. Deirdre dried her swollen eyes, and then went down to the tudio. Her head ached almost as badly as her heart; her

violent emotion, her tears and sobbing, had made her physically ill. Bellingham had no model, but was working on the background of his Truth. He was aghast at the change in his wife's face; she looked as though she had been weeping for a week.

"Arthur," she said, "I have been thinking over the Irish plan. It is impossible for me to go."

"Oh, don't revive that threadbare grievance, girl; really, Deirdrè, if you are to make these scenes I must get a studio away from home. These everlasting fads are enough to worry one to death."

"But, Arthur, this is no fad. There is a reason why I cannot go—I cannot go. Ah, dear!" she cried, laying her hand on his shoulder, "do not ask this of me. I would do much for you, but Arthur, dear, not this."

She looked so ill, she pleaded so earnestly, that a thought flashed across Arthur. Was there, perhaps, some natural reason for her fancies? was she, perhaps, unfit to travel? He put his arm round her and drew her tenderly towards him, and then said something to her very gently.

"No," she cried wildly. "No, not that; but, Arthur, do not make me go. Arthur, I told you how I hated Ireland—how I dreaded it. Arthur, I cannot go; I should be wrong to go."

"Oh, yes, of course," sneered Bellingham. "I know you always please yourself from a sense of duty; but, my dear girl, pray remember that your first duty is to obey your husband, and not to nag and worry his life out with everlasting fads and scruples."

"Then, Arthur, since you wish it I will say no more. But, dear," she said gently, "I must warn you. I feel—I know—misery will come of this tour. Give it up, Arthur, before it is too late. Let us go elsewhere. Let us stay at home. Let——"

"My dear girl, stop; say no more. Now go, or perhaps I shall say something we shall both be sorry to remember."

"Yes, I will go," she said, looking as though she had received her death sentence; then when she had reached the door she suddenly turned. "Arthur, try not to be angry with me," she said. Poor child, she knew she had been aggravating.

"All right, old girl," said Arthur, who having gained the day could afford to be generous. "Now run upstairs and dry your eyes."

Well, women were strange things! He had believed that horror of hers to be dead, and now here it was as strong as ever. It must be conquered, and then it would cease to trouble the poor thing. Such fancies must be fought, not fled from. Had she had courage to battle it out, it would have ceased to trouble her years ago. How she had pleaded! He had felt a brute to resist her, though it were for her good. The effort had quite unnerved him. His hand shook; he took a mahl-stick to steady it, lit another cigar, and then went on with his work, but not for long; ere he had got into the spirit of it he was interrupted by the entrance of Michael Hanlon.

CHAPTER XI.

BELLINGHAM stood holding the inner door of the studio open for his visitor. The smile with which he greeted him was rather forced, and his face was still white with passion, but Hanlon was too well pleased to notice these things.

"Well," he cried, "this is jolly! It's all quite settled now, I suppose?"

"I suppose so," assented Bellingham with less warmth, as he walked back to his easel.

Hanlon had never before seen the figure. "What's that?" he asked sharply, with a quick feeling of anger against Bellingham.

"It's for the 'Rambler' Club," said Arthur, stepping back a pace or two to judge the effect of his work. "For the dining-room," he went on indifferently. "There's a sort of alcove at the end of it, and this thing, Truth, is to fill it up, don't you know."

"Ah."

"You don't like it. You needn't mind saying so. It's a thing I should get frightfully bored with myself."

"I am no judge," said Hanlon, stiffly.

"Ah! that's what people always say when they don't like things. I always know what my sitters mean when they say they know nothing of art. Now when people don't like your novels they say they have a bad taste, don't they, Hanlon?"

"I dare say they do."

"Of course they do, old fellow; and then you know they don't like the books just as well as I know that you can't

bear this picture. You don't do the art for the *Star*, do you, eh? No? Then I sha'n't mind very much what you think of my paintings. But now to business. When are you ready to start?"

"Any time. I think I will go to-morrow to Limerick, and then, if you'll drop me a line, I'll join you any day at Westport."

"Oh! I say, but that's too bad. We ought to do the whole thing together. We must have some sort of plan, I suppose. I've not the faintest notion how to get to Westport, or where to go when I leave it."

"You get there in the train from Dublin. I've made a little list of the places we ought to go to," said Hanlon, fumbling in his pocket.

"Not now," said Bellingham. "Don't trouble about it now. Come to dinner, if you have no better engagement, and we can talk it over afterwards."

"I can't come to dinner this evening, thank you," said Hanlon, stiffly—in the mind he was in it would be many a long day before he ate Bellingham's salt again—"but I'll look in for an hour later, if you will allow me."

"You'd much better come to dinner. Well, just as you like. If you find you can manage it, change your mind. Anyhow, we shall see you some time this evening."

But Hanlon did not change his mind. He was indignant with Bellingham, and with Deirdre, too, for that matter, that she should so debase herself.

Bellingham was still sitting over his wine when Hanlon arrived, and he found the lady alone in the drawing-room. Her face was pale and her eyelids swollen; there were dark rings about them, too, that made them look very mournful. It struck the young man how sorrowful she looked. He was pleased to see her thus depressed. Her grief placed her again on the throne of his heart as the queen of women. Her sorrow, he felt sure, was from shame at sitting for that dreadful picture. Deirdre did not smile this evening

as she greeted Hanlon, nor did she show any pleasure at seeing him.

"Bellingham asked me to come to arrange about Ireland," he said apologetically.

"Yes, I know."

"I suppose you will want to go soon, to get back for the shooting?"

"Arthur says he will start on Monday."

"But you are coming too, surely, Mrs. Bellingham?"

"I suppose so," said she very sadly.

"Do you not wish it, Mrs. Bellingham? Oh! when once you are there you will enjoy it. You can't think how beautiful it all is."

"I can remember it."

"And yet you don't wish to go back?"

"Indeed no, I do not. I can't make Arthur understand how I hate it," she continued, fixing her beautiful despairing eyes on her friend. "I have never talked to you of Ireland because you love it, and I—oh! I have good cause to hate it. My father was murdered there. I was wretched there. I dread to think of going back. Oh, Mr. Hanlon, persuade Arthur to leave me behind."

Hanlon's tender sympathetic gaze made her remember that she should not have spoken—that husbands and wives should manage or mismanage their own affairs by themselves, and that of all men in the world Hanlon was the last she should have appealed to. Yet in him lay her only hope, none else could assist her; but, for all that, she felt she had acted disloyally towards her husband.

Just then Bellingham came into the room. "Well," he said, "are you people deep in time-tables?"

"No," said Michael. "Mrs. Bellingham doesn't seem to wish to go."

He saw that he had blundered, by the angry glance that Arthur shot at his wife and the reproachful indignation of Deirdre's eyes. He had never suspected that Mrs. Bellingham

would make him her confidant; never before had she said a word to him in her husband's absence that she would have withheld had he been in the room; but now he understood that the matter had been already discussed between them, and that Deirdrè, in despair, had appealed to him for help. He would have given anything to have been able to recall his words or to do away with their effect, but he knew by Arthur's look that he had taken in the whole situation.

However, Bellingham's annoyance seemed short-lived, for he smiled quite pleasantly as he said, "Yes, poor Deirdrè has taken such a dislike to the plan that I'm afraid, Hanlon, we shall have to leave her behind."

"Oh, Arthur, you are good," cried the girl, with tears of affection and gratitude in her eyes.

"You silly old woman, you don't suppose I should drag you for a holiday in chains? You shall not go unless you wish, but in the meantime I hope Hanlon will use his eloquence to make you change your mind."

But Hanlon felt that he owed Mrs. Bellingham some reparation.

"Well," he said, "I can understand Mrs. Bellingham feeling a little nervous. 'Tis not, you see, as though we were going merely to the great cities, and of course the country is in rather an unsettled condition."

"Still, with you, my dear fellow, a Moonlighter, or whatever you Fenians like to call yourselves, if you make the cabalistic sign the Landleaguers won't shoot us."

"There's a little coolness between the Moonlighters and Landleaguers just now," said Michael, drily.

Bellingham looked at him inquiringly. "But seriously, Hanlon, you don't think there's any danger?"

"Not if people know you for a tourist."

"But otherwise?"

"Well, of course," said Hanlon, teasingly, "they might shoot you by mistake if they took ye on the one hand for a Moonlighter, or on the other for a bailiff——"

"Oh," cried Deirdrè, "don't go, Arthur, don't go!" Her face was white and strained with terror.

"You goose!" said Bellingham, "Hanlon is only in fun."

"Yes, indeed, Mrs. Bellingham," said the young man contritely. "Believe me, your husband is at least as safe there as here. It was a very stupid speech of mine, but I assure you there's not a word of truth in it. You are as safe—safer—in Connaught than you are here. You might live there for ever and nobody would hurt you."

"They are dreadful creatures," said the girl shivering.

"They are what their circumstances have made them, but they are not so depraved as to hurt strangers and women who have done them no wrong." Mr. Hanlon, you see, was speaking before the spring of '82.

But when they went down to the studio, and while they were chatting over their pipes, Hanlon advised Bellingham to leave his wife behind; not, he said, that there was the slightest danger, but that the accommodation was a little rough for a lady in the West.

"Which means," said Bellingham, "that we should find her in the way."

"Indeed it doesn't," cried Hanlon, hotly; "only I think you should understand, Bellingham, that she may have to rough it a bit."

"My dear fellow, in her youth she roughed it a good deal," said Arthur, with a peculiar smile. "However, I will tell her what you say, and then she can choose for herself whether she stays or goes."

"Well," said Hanlon, "I hope she will choose to go."

"I believe she will," said Bellingham, smiling again. And Hanlon, who liked neither the smiling nor the manner, rose and said good night.

As he walked home his thoughts were with the Bellinghams, and on the whole they were unpleasant thoughts. Several times lately he had seen little things that made him wonder whether his friends were happy, and to-day he had seen

much to make him fear they were not—much to lessen his regard for Bellingham. That picture, of course, was no affair of his, but he thought that a horsewhipping would have been good payment for it; and the idea of Mrs. Bellingham sitting for such a thing had for the moment lowered his opinion of her. Mrs. Bellingham—Mrs. Bellingham to the life—as the decoration for the smoking-room of the club! Mrs. Bellingham's face on such a figure in a club smoking-room! It was a blasphemy, an outrage on all that was pure and sacred in good womanhood.

All the day Hanlon had wondered how she could so degrade herself. Good God! the thought was horrible. No woman that he had ever known would do such a thing—only the lowest of outcasts would stoop to that. And yet she who seemed like a saint was without shame. It had been a relief to him to find her sorrowful, for somehow it was not so painful to imagine Bellingham a fiend as to degrade Deirdre, and by the time he started homewards Hanlon was quite inclined to look on his late friend as a fiend in human shape. How Mrs. Bellingham must have suffered before she made that appeal to an outsider like himself for help, and what a fool he had been, what a terrible fool! The glance that Arthur had shot at his wife fully explained how it came that Mrs. Bellingham had stood as the model for that picture. And he wondered what was the tragedy of her life. Her father had been murdered, and hence, no doubt, the roughing it to which Bellingham had made such brutal allusion. "She'll come to Ireland," he said to himself, "and pretend she likes it."

While Hanlon was thinking about the Bellinghams, they were having a final discussion on the subject of this Irish excursion. That Bellingham was sick of the subject was not to be wondered at. He had never had his will questioned so much before, and he was angry that his wife should seek Hanlon's interference. All that about the West being rough he believed had been said at her instigation.

"Deirdrè!" he said, when he went back to the drawing-room, "let me beg of you in future not to discuss our plans with Hanlon or anyone else."

"Indeed I am sorry; I said I didn't want to go before I thought of it, and then I knew it was wrong."

"Right and wrong have nothing to do with such matters. It was in execrable taste; no lady could have done such a thing."

"Don't be angry, please," said the girl, pleadingly. "I know well, dear, that I should not have done it, and I am very sorry."

"Then why on earth did you say it? You told Hanlon, I suppose, that you were afraid to go, and that I made you. For your own sake you should not say that you think me a brute."

"I said nothing of the kind, Arthur."

"Well, I suppose you gave some reason for not wishing to go."

"I said the truth—that I hate the very name of Ireland."

"Ah!"

"Oh, don't look like that, Arthur; say anything, only don't look like that."

"My dear, I am interested in this account of your confidences with Mr. Hanlon. Pray don't interrupt them. Hanlon came into the room, and then you told him you hated the very name of Ireland. That was, to say the least, courteous to an Irishman."

"He asked me if I was not pleased at the thought of going back, and I said that I hated it; so I do."

"What else did you tell him? You did not, I suppose, merely tell him that you hated Ireland."

"I said that father had—had been murdered there. Nothing more."

"Well, my dear, I think that was quite enough. What else was there that you could have told him? You could hardly have said that your father was killed for charging a higher rent to the tenants than he gave to Mr. Butler."

"I could not have said that, because it would not have been true."

"I don't pretend to understand these little matters. I am only repeating what Butler told me; but I think, if you value your father's good name, you will be wise not to court inquiry."

"Mr. Butler forgets. But he ought not to say such things of a man who is dead and cannot defend himself. He is thinking of some other man, not of father."

Mrs. Bellingham spoke in a tone of quiet certainty.

"Very well. Then we will let that pass. I am sure I don't want to think your father a rogue. But you understand, Dierdrè, that you are not to discuss my plans with anyone, or ask their interference."

"Yes, Arthur."

"And that you are to go to Ireland cheerfully and willingly."

"If you wish it, dear."

"Of course I wish it. I can't leave a girl of eighteen alone in London. You must go with me; and I need hardly say that if Hanlon takes advantage of your indiscretion to reopen the subject you must give him to understand that you go of your own wish."

"I don't suppose he will think of the matter again."

"I don't know. You have made such a rumpus about it."

"There shall be no more rumpus," she said gently. "And I know, dear, that it has been all my fault. But it's over now. I mean the rumpus"—she was quite unconscious that "rumpus" was not a dictionary word—"and I hope the fault is too. I am sorry that you have had such a wretched day," she continued, stooping and kissing his hand, "and I will never fight for my own way again. Will you kiss me, Arthur?"

Bellingham was mollified—he was easily mollified, because the girl was so lovely, and looked so sweet and tender when she pleaded with him. He took the sad face between his hands and kissed it.

"I can't be angry with you long, old woman, however unreasonable you are," he said. "You lead your poor old husband a sad dance with your whims and fancies; but there, never mind, my love; good night, and God bless you."

Deirdre was so weary and spent with the emotions of that day that neither shame, nor sorrow, nor repentance had power to keep her awake. She wept as she undressed herself, and whilst she prayed; but when Bellingham came upstairs he found her fast asleep, with no sign on her pure pale face of the passion and misery she had undergone. The sorrow that had no power to banish sleep could not, Bellingham thought, be great; he smiled, saying to himself that he was led sadly blindfold by that little Circe. Who that had seen her two hours ago could think that she would sleep that night? Truly her sleep was broken with sobs, and moans, and sighs, but no one can excite herself like that without suffering.

Mrs. Bellingham was as good as her word. She made no more rumpus, but went about looking woebegone and tragic to an extent that her husband felt sure was intentional. Any one could look cheerful if she chose, and all this ado about nothing irritated Bellingham to the last degree. This dejected manner, this loss of appetite, showed an obstinate and sullen temper that must be checked in youth. He had had no idea that the girl had so much temper. Words, he felt, would be wasted upon her in her present disposition; the wisest and kindest course would be to ignore her ill-humour and treat the Irish tour as a settled affair. He was convinced that all these sulks were intended to punish him for having resisted a very foolish whim of hers, and he thought it probable that they were maintained in the vain hope that he would give in at the last moment. He must show her that he would be master, and that she had not taken the right means of getting her own way. He did not ask himself by what means she might have obtained her own way.

All this time Deirdre was too absorbed in her shame and misery to notice that Arthur was offended with her. The

days passed in a confused maze till on Sunday evening they took the night train for Holyhead. Throughout the journey Deirdrè was in a pitiable state of nervous terror, and when she arrived in Dublin dared scarcely look around her.

But Dublin, she thought, was not like Ireland at all; the shabby red brick houses and picturesque weedy squares had a friendly aspect that somehow reminded her of Villecourt. She became much more cheerful, and was as anxious to remain in Dublin as Arthur was to get on to Westport. Bellingham, of course, prevailed; they remained in Dublin only two days, and on the third morning set out for Westport.

Deirdrè had prepared for that journey with hours of prayer and agony. Her situation was indeed a trying one, for at Westport Hanlon was to meet them, and they were to continue the tour as one party. Nothing, it seemed to her, could be more terrible than that association—nothing more degrading. At one moment she made up her mind to tell her husband how matters stood, but she remembered in time that she had no right to sacrifice his peace of mind, nor to implicate Hanlon. It was her punishment—at once her punishment and her temptation. To strive against her love when Michael was not there was by comparison an easy matter. But how could she kill her love for him when every moment his dear voice and his beloved face were a renewal of the love that as she now knew had been born the first time that she had seen him. She slept not at all the night before they started for Westport. The eve of the battle is best passed in prayer, and on the morrow she was to fight a battle for heaven or hell, in which there must be no moment of rest, no truce, until she once more set foot on English soil. Her face was even more than usually pale, and there were dark lines beneath her eyes, when she set forth on the journey. Her lips were set and her manner calm, though her face was sorrowful, so sorrowful that Arthur felt some pity for the girl. Had she wept his heart would have hardened towards her, but she struggled so bravely to be cheerful, to talk and amuse him,

that he said as they reached Westport, "You are a good little girl, Deirdrè. I really do believe you try to be a good little girl."

It is so difficult to be good under temptation, and temptation was very near at hand, for there at the Westport station stood Hanlon—Hanlon the cheerful, Hanlon the young, Hanlon the reverential. There was nothing in Hanlon's manner that intimated that he believed Deirdrè tried to be a good little girl; there was always a subtle respect about his treatment of her, for all that he was so friendly; and indeed he was old-fashioned enough to feel respect for all good women, even the youngest and the fairest.

He had brought a car to the station, and they all went back to the town together, Deirdrè's heart going down, down, down at every step. There were the old stone walls on each side the road, just such walls as the one she had sat on on that fatal evening. She felt so faint she had to catch hold of the back of the car to keep herself from falling. There was the dreadful little town, so like to Ballymoneyboy. It was not really like Ballymoneyboy at all, for Ballymoneyboy has no laughing river splashing down its street, no shading lime-trees, no demesne at the end of its deserted quay. But to Deirdrè it recalled the half-forgotten village with its ill-paved streets and shabby grey stone houses. She was again in memory trotting along that dreary street by Molly's side, going to Grogan's to buy her black clothes. She had forgotten all about that day, but now everything came back to her—Molly's soft voice; the shrinking pity of the passers-by; the whispered gossip; the very aspect of Grogan's shop. Old Grogan was just giving her that keepsake of the fancy pin-box she had had so many years when—jerk—the car stopped, and in another moment Hanlon was holding out his arms and saying, "Now, Mrs. Bellingham," and then she had sprung on to the ground.

It was, Bellingham said, a pity to waste all the afternoon in the house. He would go for a stroll in the town and

see whether there were not some architecture or something of that kind. Hanlon smiled grimly, and murmured something about the Norman cathedral and Roman remains, and then they all three went out together, Deirdrè looking very much as though she were going to her execution. The town seemed more like Ballymoneyboy than before, and the plaintive voices of the starving creatures who followed them had a terribly familiar ring. Hanlon noticed that Mrs. Bellingham grew paler at every step ; he would have liked to have thrashed Bellingham for his brutal indifference.

"I am sure Mrs. Bellingham is tired," he said at length, when Arthur proposed that they should halt in the demesne.

"I think not," replied the husband coldly ; but something ominously like a sob warned him that Deirdrè was about to make a fool of herself, and he took her back to the hotel. Then the two men went for a brisk walk together, but there was a constraint between them, and each was glad to return. At dinner-time things were no more comfortable. Deirdrè sat speechless, looking like the tragic Muse, and her misery made one of the men too unhappy and the other too cross for them to be able to give their attention to the flagging conversation. After dinner Deirdrè said that she was tired and would go to bed, and Hanlon ventured to remark to Bellingham that Mrs. Bellingham looked quite knocked up.

"She is a person who shows fatigue very readily," answered Arthur in a chilling manner that was meant to close the subject ; and Hanlon, fearing that he might not be able to contain his indignation, rose, said good night, and went to his own room to work.

After he had gone Bellingham lit another cigar, picked up a novel, and sat smoking and reading until a late hour. He was unhappy and disappointed at his wife's behaviour, and irritated that Hanlon so obviously took her part. But when he went to his room the sight of Deirdrè's grey drawn face and shuddering limbs alarmed him, and he felt a sudden return of tenderness towards her.

He laid his hand on her arm. "Why, you are as cold as a corpse?" he cried. "Do you feel ill, my darling? How you tremble! It's ague, I'm afraid."

"Perhaps I have taken a cold."

"Rather; I should think so," he said with assumed cheerfulness. "Have you ever been like this before?"

"Often," she said, sobbing and quaking.

And then Bellingham guessed that this was one of those nervous attacks she had spoken of to him, but an instinctive delicacy made him keep this suspicion to himself. "What do you do for it, love?" he asked, holding her trembling form in his arms.

"Nothing; it goes away in time."

"Well, I shall see if I can't send it away at once with hot brandy-and-water." The prosaic remedy had its effect; the quaking of the limbs ceased, and in half an hour the exhausted girl was asleep. Then Bellingham thought all was well. And Deirdrè, too, in her sleep, had at first a consciousness of relief and trouble passed. But soon she and Michael were walking at eventide across fields—such a familiar dream—till, coming to a stone wall, they sat and rested on it, hand in hand. With a sickening knowledge of what was coming, Deirdrè felt the stones slip from under her; she fell, and Michael fell with her, and in falling she grasped a hand which, laying hold of her, dragged them down, down, into a dark deep grave. At the top stood Arthur, holding a long-handled spade. He threw a sod on them, another, then another. Michael's hand had turned rotten and corrupt in her grasp; still she was forced to hold it, while sod after sod imprisoned her with that ghastly thing. She could not move, and Arthur, still cool and revengeful, threw the earth on his guilty wife. All over her lay the cold, damp, heavy clay; and now a sod fell on her face. She could not see Arthur any more, but a dull falling weight told her he was still working on. Air! air! She could not breathe. Air! It was stifling! Air! She struggled, but she could not move. Air! air! Oh, what was

that creeping across her face—a worm? Oh, help! help! help! The grave was full of worms. “Arthur!” she cried, “Arthur, help!”

“My dearest one, what is it?” asked Arthur, awakened by her sudden cry.

“Oh, I have had such a horrible dream,” said the poor thing, weeping and shivering.

“Poor old woman, I should think so,” said Arthur, who had never been afraid of a dream in his life. “Now go to sleep and have a pleasant one to drive out the remembrance of the last.”

But Deirdrè was too shaken to sleep, and too frightened to wish to incur further risk, though waking with a guilty conscience for company was little better than sleep. Her dream, too, seemed a sin and a shame. To dream of Mr. Hanlon—it was terrible.

The next day she was ill, ill enough to excuse herself from joining the men on their expedition; and the day after that she was unwell enough to be able to say truthfully that she could not go with them to Croagh Patrick. Thus for two days she managed to avoid Hanlon, and both evenings the young man went to his room to write. But on the third morning they were to leave Westport for Leenane, and Deirdrè, ailing though she was, had to go too.

She sat pale and silent, fighting a desperate battle with her own heart. The men unconsciously added to her struggle, for it was impossible that Hanlon's delicate and respectful consideration should not be more lovable than her husband's ill-concealed displeasure that she should have chosen to be ill at so inconvenient a time. Indeed she was not an inspiring companion; her heart was broken with shame and love, and her terrors made her nights a poor defence against her days. She strove to hide her misery, and if she failed to be cheerful let those who have succeeded in a like case condemn her failure.

To Bellingham her efforts were intensely aggravating, and

Hanlon's devotion an impertinent censure upon his own wiser method of dealing with the girl's hysteric fancies, which she might have overcome had she really tried. He lost all patience with her, and after the first week did not attempt to hide his irritation, even in Hanlon's presence. He abused everything, including his wife, until the younger man's heart was so filled with the wrongs and sorrows of this lovely lady that Kitty was quite forgotten, and not even the thought of the young lawyer of Limerick gave him a pang.

But it was not till the Bellinghams left Galway, not till the train puffed away, leaving him on the platform alone, that Hanlon realised how much Mrs. Bellingham had become to him, how empty life was without her. He would have given half his life to live those three weeks through again—weeks of discomfort, embittered by Bellingham's ill-humour, but weeks passed in the society of her whom he now knew was dearer to him than the whole world, but with whom, now that he knew what his heart felt, he must associate no more. On that point he was very clear. He must not see her any more.

CHAPTER XII.

"Oh, I am glad," sighed Deirdrè, as they left Galway behind them.

"Not more glad than I," said Bellingham, "to leave both Ireland and Hanlon. I'd no idea he was such a confoundedly sullen fellow; and I hope, Deirdrè, that now we are out of this God-forgotten hole, you, too, will recover your temper."

Deirdrè tried to smile as a token of returning good-humour. She had thought that once quit of Hanlon the struggle would be over; that she would be able to put him from her mind, and do her duty by the husband she so sorely tried. But the anguish she had undergone told severely on her health, and now that the strain was relaxed she was surprised to find how weary and listless she felt.

"For heaven's sake don't look so hang-dog," said Bellingham; "try to pluck up a little spirit, and behave more like other women."

He had made arrangements to stay with various friends on his return from Ireland, and to take his wife with him; he wished now that he had not done so, for no one seeing Deirdrè in Ireland could have failed to perceive that she was a broken-hearted woman. But to her husband's relief she became much less dejected among the strange scenes and new faces. Now Hanlon was no longer with her, her heart and conscience made a truce. That dreadful time of vivid sensibility had exhausted her feelings, and after that hand-to-hand conflict with the powers of evil she felt stunned and unemotional—nothing moved her greatly. All power of love and interest had deserted her, everything was alike

indifferent. Whilst in Ireland she had prayed with an intensity and zeal she had never known before; she had striven with her passion with an energy and watchfulness that seemed inexhaustible, but now her heart felt dead, and her soul too. Heaven and God appeared as unreal as the torturing dreams that had made her nights as restless as her days. All her senses were dull; she had no longer any power of feeling either pleasure or pain. No one would have suspected her of being miserable, only stupid and impassive. Arthur's friends wondered how he could have married so dull a woman—a woman who cared neither for scenery, nor for amusement, nor for painting, nor music, nor even dress. She was never seen to pick up a book, and if she spoke to the children of the house it was without zest or interest.

The men, and Arthur among them, spent their days shooting and walking; the ladies at home agreed that Mrs. Bellingham was a very dead weight. She took no interest in anything, and for her own part Deirdre felt in a state betwixt sleeping and waking. Often she knew not what her hostess was talking of, and gave incoherent answers. Bellingham was as popular as his wife was the reverse—such a good fellow, such a good shot too, such a good stroke at billiards, such a beautiful dancer, so good at private theatricals, such a good hand at whist. He was the ideal guest for a country house, and this sort of life was to him the ideal existence—shooting by day and dancing and games in the evening. He enjoyed these visits to the utmost, and by his merriment helped others to enjoy themselves too. The friends with whom the Bellinghams stayed were rich, and their houses well ordered. Arthur felt it to be quite an education to Deirdre, both in manners and housekeeping, and he never lost an opportunity of impressing upon her the extent of this privilege. "Charming woman Lady Colins is, Deirdre; I should like you to have a walking dress like hers."

"With a tie and collar, Arthur? I thought you hated mannish dresses."

"Well, Lady Colins looks charming in hers, and that neat little jockey cap."

"That, I suspect, is more due to Lady Colins than the dress."

"She ain't half so handsome as you are—it's manner. You should try to imitate her manner."

"But I couldn't do it, Arthur. I don't know a spavin from the glanders, nor what makes a horse look——"

"That's a bit of feminine jealousy, I suspect, old woman. A woman can be charming whether she be horsey or no. Lady Colins is a charming woman, and a certain little maid is consumed by unholy envy."

"You have given me no cause, Arthur," said Deirdre, smiling; "but now I know that her manners please you, I'll imitate them. 'Been to the kennels yet, eh, Bellingham? Turco's got the spavin in 'is eye, and that fool Smithson was givin' 'im a hot bran mash. Lucky thing I went round in time to stop 'im.'"

Deirdre made this speech with her back to their bedroom fire, for Lady Colins's charms were the intended subject of a curtain lecture. Bellingham laughed and kissed her. "No, you can't do Lady Colins, but if you chose you might be quite as charming. Now, why can't you be amusing like that downstairs, and not let Lady Colins have it all her own way?"

But the next evening Deirdre would be as dull as ever. The manners of the various guests were not the only examples held up for imitation, and generally Arthur had some such remark as, "Deirdre, did you notice the soup?"

"No, Arthur," would be the reply; "tell me about it; was it very good?"

"It wasn't so much the taste as the way the vegetables were cut up in it. Now do notice if we have it again, and then you can teach cook how to do it when we get home."

To which Deirdre would answer, "Very well, Arthur," but she was sure not to notice the soup, which Bellingham would try to explain in his incomprehensible masculine fashion.

"You ought to be learning no end about housekeeping," he would say from time to time, and when in November they got back to Kensington his wife's housekeeping seemed to him very defective. The houses which they had visited were owned by people with four or five times his income, and managed by women with fifty times Deirdre's experience. Bellingham forgot this; all he remembered was that the dinners at home were not so well arranged or so well cooked as those he had had in other houses. "I can't think how it is," he would say pettishly, "that other people get things done decently and my house is always in a mess."

It was a most unjust aspersion, for Deirdre saw to the house being kept in a state of conventual cleanliness and brightness, but, like most young women, she was blind to the importance of cooking, and the dinners, though contrived with much labour, were her weak point. An inch of dust on the furniture would have annoyed Bellingham less than two roasts for dinner. His wife's steady refusal to eat meat on abstinence days also displeased him. She had long since given up expecting him to make his dinner of fish, and now he thought it unreasonable of her to sit there eating potatoes and expect him to enjoy his meat. It was, he said, a silent reproach and a piece of pharisaic self-righteousness.

"I wish you were not so silly," he remarked on more than one occasion. "It is too bad of you when I have been working all day to behave in a manner that would set any man against his dinner. Do you suppose the Almighty cares whether Mrs. Arthur Bellingham eats meat for her dinner on Friday or not? I should be sorry, I know, to have so paltry a conception of the Deity. And as for its being fasting, it would be much more mortification of the flesh to eat meat against your inclination than to go without it."

These arguments were delivered with considerable temper, and as they elicited no response Bellingham naturally came to the conclusion that his wife had no answer to make. But she continued in her evil ways, which showed her to be not

only unreasoning but obstinate. She and Bellingham jarred on each other at every turn, and were daily drifting farther and farther apart.

Naturally he suffered the less of the two. When a man has an uncongenial home, all he needs to do is to leave it, and Bellingham devoted little more of his time to Deirdre than he had done to Andreina. His mornings he spent in the studio, and when he wished it his wife spent hers with him. She always set his palette for him, and got his painting things ready; then she either sat to him or left the studio, as he wished. When the short winter daylight closed in, Bellingham generally went out to his club. Deirdre used to be as slow as possible in cleaning the palette and washing the brushes; the dark afternoons were so lonely and long, and three or four times a week after long waiting she sat down to her dinner alone, and remained alone until it was time to go to bed. Sometimes she became so timid that she dared not go up the stairs by herself, and sat shivering in the drawing-room till Bellingham returned. Whilst she sat thus alone all her sorrows crowded into her mind, so that those winter evenings were not very happy.

Both Mrs. Stanley and Rose Butler saw how wrong things were going, though the young wife was too proud to give any hint at the state of affairs. Moreover, she felt that all that had befallen her was a just punishment. It did not occur to her that perhaps had Arthur been a little more tender to her she might never have given Hanlon a thought; nor did she remember how bravely she had met her temptation, how hard she was fighting against it still. All she thought was that she had allowed some one to become more to her than her husband, and that therefore she deserved any neglect, any reproach. Still it was not this feeling only which kept her silent; wounded vanity and wounded affection prevented her from confessing that her husband had tired of her. But Susan Stanley was not the woman to let the times grow out of joint for want of a little surgery.

One evening she made some theatre tickets an excuse for calling on Arthur after dinner. He was out, William said, but Mrs. Bellingham was upstairs.

"So Arthur is out?" cried Mrs. Stanley, as she entered the drawing-room. "That happens rather too often now, does it not?"

"Of course Arthur is not always at home."

"Nor even generally, my dear, I fear, from all accounts."

Deirdrè flushed up. She hated to think that her affairs were discussed.

"Who has been discussing your brother to you?" she asked coldly.

"Oh, my dear, every one. It is common talk how devoted he is to his club."

"At least it is not news. He has been devoted to his club for twenty years," said Deirdrè, with an attempt at indifference.

"Ah, but now that he is a married man it's not the same. A man when he marries gives up all that, my dear. You should keep him at home. I meant to tell him so. You must not let people see that he is tired of you."

"Is he tired of me? I am sure he did not tell you that."

"No, not *he*, my dear."

"And *I* did not tell you, certainly."

"No, you are so reserved."

"It may be that I have nothing to reserve," said Deirdrè, her temper rising. "Since neither Arthur nor I told you that he is tired of me, you cannot know it, Mrs. Stanley. It is gossip; and, if you please, I don't care for gossip, least of all for gossip about my husband."

"Oh, Deirdrè, what a way to meet my friendship! A young wife like you may well need the friendship of an older woman!"

"As much I as any one," said the girl rather sadly.

"Then, Deirdrè, why do you reject the friendship of your husband's sister?"

"Do you really offer me your friendship, Mrs. Stanley? I doubt it. You never liked me. You dislike me now. I do not wonder at that. Don't think I wish to reproach you with it; but that is the truth. You never were my friend."

"You are wrong, my dear, utterly wrong," said Mrs. Stanley, laying her hand on Deirdre's arm. "Candidly, I confess that I disapproved of Arthur marrying you, as much for your sake as for his. I did not think you suited. You cannot say, Deirdre, that in that I was not your friend."

"It was natural you should oppose the marriage. I was not Arthur's equal; you could not be expected to approve." She made no return to Mrs. Stanley's caresses.

"It is not only that, Deirdre. In other ways you are not fit to be Arthur's wife."

"Mrs. Stanley!" cried the girl, shaking herself free. Of what was this woman going to accuse her?

"No, my dear. Your views of life are too strict to suit a man of the world like Arthur. If you knew his past, you—with your ideas—would never be happy again. Where is he now? Do you know that? How can you tell that he is at his club? At one time he was very fond of a certain Madame Terpsichore—as a friend——"

"I think you had better go, Mrs. Stanley," cried Deirdre, rising and pointing to the door. "If you like it, come one day and tell Arthur whom I receive when he is out. Go, make your mischief elsewhere. You cannot make me doubt my husband. You shall not slander him in his own house."

"How dare you insult me so, you wicked child?" exclaimed Mrs. Stanley. "How dare you speak to me like that? I shall not warn you again. Arthur may go to all the actresses in London, and you shall not hear of it from me."

"Thank you. When Arthur wishes me to know he will, no doubt, tell me himself."

"Insolent creature!" With that Mrs. Stanley left the room.

While this discussion was going on at home Arthur was

innocently playing whist at the club. For him, at least, Madame Terpsichore and her kind had ceased to exist, and had Deirdrè been able to follow him each afternoon when he left his home she would have found herself in no more fearful place than the club. But to do Mrs. Stanley justice, she herself believed Arthur's time was more viciously employed. Men were to her creatures always in mischief when out of sight, and she thought it only fair to give Deirdrè warning, just as she thought it would be fair to give Arthur a hint of a suspicion she entertained of Deirdrè's indifference to himself.

But Mrs. Bellingham, when her sister-in-law left the room, was too furious to be either suspicious or sad. Infamous traitor! how had she dared to speak ill of her own brother! how could women defile themselves with such suspicions and such thoughts! And if she really had such thoughts in her mind, Arthur, and not his wife, was the person to whom she should have spoken of them. Mrs. Bellingham resolved to tell every word of the talk to her husband, and then, after the manner of this young woman, she resolved she would not so much as mention Mrs. Stanley's visit, for after all the woman was his sister, and her treachery might pain him. Moreover, Deirdrè did not wish Arthur to think she suspected him, or that she wished to reproach him with neglect, and if he had ever cared for the dancing woman, Deirdrè felt he would not like her to know of it. On the whole this plan of silence seemed the best. It could not wound Arthur or in any way annoy him. Besides, the wisdom of proverbs told her that second thoughts are best, and that "*On se repent souvent d'avoir parlé, jamais d'avoir su se taire.*" Such double testimony could not be resisted, and when Bellingham came home he found his wife in bed, but awake, and more cheerful than usual.

But though Deirdrè angrily put this slander from her, it did not increase her peace of mind. She would not suspect Arthur; still, at times, now that it was too late, she wished she had told him of that suggestion of Mrs. Stanley's. Poor Deirdrè! had she acted in defiance of the teachings of old

saws she would have been a happier woman. She had made her sister-in-law her enemy, and it would have been as well that Arthur should know of her enmity. As it was, Susan opened the attack the next time that she saw her brother.

"Deirdrè has told you, I suppose, what a quarrel she and I had the other night?"

"No," said Arthur. "I didn't even know you'd been to see her."

"Well, I'm glad she was ashamed. Such a passion, Arthur, she flew into when I remarked that you were out. I hate to suspect people, but it *did* just occur to me that she was not sorry to be left alone."

"She must be fond of dulness then."

"Yes, if she is alone; but of course she's not always alone. Twice when I've been there young Dawn was calling." Something fiery in Arthur's glance warned her to stop.

"Good gracious, Susan," he cried. "Whatever do you mean? She doesn't care a fig for Dawn."

"Nor for young Dawn, nor for anybody else?"

"I don't understand you," said Arthur; "do explain yourself, Susan."

Susan shrugged her shoulders.

"My dear Arthur, do you *still* think she has a heart?"

"If she hasn't, that's a fault on the right side," said Arthur.

"Only that even heartless girls will amuse themselves."

Arthur smiled. So Susan meant to hint that Deirdrè amused herself with young Dawn. The insinuation did not afflict him in the least; it was a shot very wide of the mark.

By this time the Bellinghams had been home three months, Christmas was past, and people were for the most part come back to town. The club had ceased to be Bellingham's one place of amusement, and he and his wife often went out together. Deirdrè never went to certain houses without the fear of meeting Hanlon; but chance, or the young man's discretion, favoured her, and she had never seen him since their

parting at Galway. He had been once or twice to the studio on business, but he had called on her only once, and that before she had returned to town. Was this mere chance, or guessing her secret, did he avoid her from disgust or pity? Chance must ere this have deserted them; it must be design, and if design, he must have discerned during that time in Ireland her shameful secret and her guilty misery. Well, his contempt was a light punishment for her sin; she must be thankful no worse had come to her. But this philosophy did not prevent her heart from sinking with shame when she thought how contemptible she must appear in the sight of the man she respected and loved.

The sudden ending of the friendship between the Bellinghams and Hanlon mystified Rose, and deprived Deirdre's house of one of its attractions. Unlike her friend, Rose did sometimes chance to meet the young man, and from the constraint of his manner when she spoke of the Bellinghams she imagined there had been some disagreement.

"Deirdre," she said one day, "why weren't you at the Lucas's dance, last night?"

"Because we don't know them," answered Deirdre, laughing.

"What a pity. *Everyone* was there, it was *such* fun. Your friend Mr. Hanlon was there, in a coat that must have been made before the Flood. He danced with me six times." Here Rose raised her eyes with an expression of superhuman innocence.

"Poor Captain Campbell."

"Yes; Alex is *so* absurd. He can't bear Mr. Hanlon, I'm sure I *can't* think why."

"I suppose because you danced with Captain Campbell only five times."

"Oh, he could hardly be so stupid as to mind that, especially as we—I mean Mr. Hanlon and I, you know—talked about nothing but *you*."

"Poor Mr. Hanlon."

"Well he *did* seem rather—don't you know—rather—I don't know how to express it."

"Bored?"

"No, not *bored*, Deirdrè; as though I should tell you even if he had. But nobody could be bored with talking about *you*, you dear old thing."

"They keep that for talking *with* me?" suggested Deirdrè, smiling.

"Well, of course I think you might be *more* amusing than you are, Deirdrè, if you were to try. You *do* rather snub people up, sometimes; not that I think you *ever* used to snub Mr. Hanlon. By the way," she went on indifferently, "why do I never meet him here now?"

"I suppose because he never comes," replied Mrs. Bellingham with equal indifference, as she stooped to pick up a skein of silk which had fallen from her lap.

"Never is comparative, I suppose?" continued Rose, still with an elaborate indifference that her friend must have perceived had she not been so busy controlling her own emotions.

"No, I think he and Arthur grew rather tired of each other in Ireland. Since we came back he has never been except on business."

"Then it was *Arthur* he came *up here* to see so often!"

"Evidently, since he has ceased to come," replied Deirdrè frigidly.

"Oh, Deirdrè, don't be offended," cried Rose, turning very red. "I didn't mean to vex you." And then Miss Butler threw her arms round her friend and began to cry. "I wish I'd never mentioned that horrid Mr. Hanlon."

"Dear Rosy," cried Deirdrè, kissing her, "I am not vexed. Why should you not talk about Mr. Hanlon as of anyone else. What is the matter, darling Rose? What are you crying for, my dear?"

"Nothing," sobbed the girl, clinging closer to her friend; "only, Deirdrè, I am so very very wretched. I *can't* go on always seeming happy."

Deirdrè pressed the little creature to her. "Ah, Rose, what is it? Tell me what it is, dear, that grieves you? My poor little Rose," she went on, kissing the round pink cheeks, "it breaks my heart to see you so unhappy."

But Rose went on sobbing, till at length Mrs. Bellingham asked, "Rose, is there some quarrel with Captain Campbell?"

"Dear old Alex; no, indeed; it's the old trouble, Deirdrè; that man I told you about before."

"And it is still impossible to marry him?"

"It always will be," replied Rose, tragically.

"Then it seems a pity to think so much about him," said practical Deirdrè, "and if you mean to marry Captain Campbell, not quite right, dear Rose."

"Ah, Deirdrè, how can *you* know! You happy child, who have married the man you love!"

As Miss Butler said this she looked at her friend, but there was no expression on Mrs. Bellingham's face to show whether she had or had not married the man she loved.

"Yes, I am the last to preach," said Mrs. Bellingham, gravely, and then the talk turned on other matters. But, after Miss Butler left, Deirdrè wondered who was the man for whom her friend wept so bitterly. Michael was not even among those who came to her mind, for what impediment was there between Rose and Michael if they loved one another? Besides, Miss Butler made most unmerciful sport of poor Hanlon's clothes, and his brogue, and his boots. Nor could she see his good looks nor any charm of manner. As for his novels, she could never get through them—a circumstance which explains the undoubted length of time they remained in Cornwall Terrace. In short, to Rose, Hanlon appeared quite ridiculous, and who would suspect that a young lady could care for a man she thought ridiculous? Certainly not Mrs. Bellingham.

CHAPTER XIII.

THOSE lonely evenings whilst Arthur was in clubland were not the best thing that could have happened to the poor young girl, and her husband's neglect of her was not calculated to help her to forget Michael Hanlon.

But she strove to do her duty, and to banish Mr. Hanlon from her thoughts; and in this the young man's behaviour helped her greatly, since his avoidance of her was, as she thought, little less than insulting. But 'at last, one bright early February day, there came a meeting. The day was so lovely and so much like spring that Bellingham put his palette aside and said he would drive out with his wife.

It was a most unusual condescension, and Deirdrè, hoping it was the first of many such drives, strove her utmost to be pleasant, and, if possible, as gay as the delightful Lady Colins. She was succeeding fairly well, and Arthur was thinking that really she was a nice little girl after all, that it was rather too bad to leave her so much to herself, and that she must be a bit hipped while he was away in the evenings, when she bowed to someone, and blushed overpoweringly red, and the little joke she had been making died unfinished on her lips.

"What made you turn so red?" he asked imperiously. He thought it ill-bred to change colour on such occasions.

"Did I turn red?" said she, blushing yet more deeply and in rather a forced voice.

"Rather," sneered her husband, "like a milkmaid. Why, you are all of a tremble now. Who passed to agitate you so?"

"Heaps of people are passing us," said Deirdre, whose talent for subterfuge was limited.

Arthur would have been less than mortal if this evasion had not aroused his curiosity. "Tut!" he cried, "who did you bow to?"

"Mr. Hanlon."

"Mr. Hanlon! Why on earth is there all this mystery about Mr. Hanlon?" cried Arthur, a light suddenly bursting in upon his mind. "Mr. Hanlon! And why is Mr. Hanlon so agitating to you that his passing throws you into a fever. It cannot be that his overwhelming attentions have dismayed you. Really," he added with a harsh laugh, "I'm sorry his neglect is so painful to you. You must have suffered greatly in these last five months."

"These last ten months," said the wife quietly. It was ten months since their marriage.

Bellingham looked at her in anger and amazement. It was so unlike Deirdre to be ready with an answer. Never before had he heard her speak like that—bitterly, concisely, so much to the point. And she did not seem angry; that angered him still more.

"At last," he cried, "we have found a subject on which we can agree. I did not know till now that you, too, repented of our marriage. I had kept the knowledge to myself, thinking it might pain you to find that I regretted having given you my name and home, but it is a satisfaction to know that you, too, find our marriage a failure; and to this, I suppose, I may add the pleasing discovery that Hanlon has gained the love you have denied to me. You seem, somehow, to have missed your mark. Hanlon appears to have rejected the affection you have so generously offered him—unless, of course," he added after a pause, "you may have meeting-places at the churches and convents you are both so fond of going to; and, perhaps, I ought to be grateful to you for refraining from receiving your lover under your husband's roof."

For answer Deirdre pulled the cord and signalled to the coachman to stop.

"I shall get out," she said as the carriage drew up.

"So shall I," cried Bellingham, following her. "John, drive home."

"You will not walk with me," said Deirdre in an undertone, her whole frame quivering with emotion.

"Ah! That's it, is it?" said Bellingham with a forced laugh. "You want to catch up Hanlon. Where is he waiting? I had no idea it was an assignation, or I would not have spoilt sport by coming out with you this afternoon; but, being here, I will see the play out."

"Which way do you take?" said the girl, standing still.

"My dear, I leave the choice with you."

"I wish to be alone; beyond that I have no choice."

"But I do not choose for you to be alone. So suppose we walk home together?" said Bellingham, who began to see that he had said too much.

"Never!" cried his wife. "I will never go back with you. I would rather die in the streets." She turned and walked away.

She walked quickly through the Park and Bellingham followed her. She hardly noticed that her husband was with her, nor did she know in the least where she was going. On she went, straight on, with no set purpose except to keep away from Kensington. Quickly she went, for the fever in her veins made a swift movement necessary. She left the Park at the Marble Arch, and went on—on up the Edgware Road, and then when she began to weary she wondered what she should do. Where should she go? Not home. No, never would she again be under Arthur's roof. She put her hand into her pocket; she had not got her purse. She was without a penny in the world, without a friend who would help her. Not even the Butlers would assist her in leaving her husband. On she walked, on, on. The shops were now left behind, and the road had a suburban look. Soon she would

reach the country, and there she could sit down and rest under a hedge. Her anger was melted, there was no longer any fever in her veins; she was so weary she could hardly drag her tired limbs along, so spent she could scarcely refrain from tears. She would have sat down on a doorstep and wept had not Arthur been there.

But Arthur followed her step for step. Like her he had started in anger, but his heart was now filled with pity and remorse. He had gone too far; he could not help feeling that he had been in the wrong. When he came to think it over, he knew of absolutely nothing against either Hanlon or his wife, and whatever there might be between them he had clearly gone too far. He ought not to have insulted her like that: and now that he came to think it over, he did not believe that they had secret meetings. Certainly he would forgive her the moment she said she was sorry; but she did not ask his forgiveness, so they walked silently on. The whole thing, he thought, was very mysterious. If she had cared for Hanlon she would not have begged so hard not to go to Ireland. If Hanlon cared for her why did he so persistently avoid the house? Then the thought flashed across him that perhaps this mutual avoidance was due to the fact that they were too dear to each other.

Deirdre's steps were by this time faltering and uneven. The passers-by, less numerous now, turned to look at the beautiful woman whose face was so wan and white and despairing, and who was so evidently sinking from fatigue.

Bellingham began to feel heartily ashamed of himself; still he deferred his apology, hoping that she would make the first move, as she had done so many times before. He wished he knew how matters were between her and Hanlon: whether both loved—he thought they did—and when that love had been confessed, and also whether they were shunning each other because of that unlawful love. If so they were behaving as well as they could do; and, besides, there was a chance that there was nothing between them at all. The thought

that perhaps he had insulted his wife without cause made him guess that she would die before she begged his pardon. There was no time to be lost if he did not wish for a scene on the public road. More than once she had stumbled. She could not hold out much longer; she would faint and fall. He hurried to get alongside of her. The ghastly pallor of her wan face appalled him.

"Deirdrè," he cried, "forgive me! Indeed, Deirdrè, I didn't mean a word of what I said just now."

"Then why did you say it, Arthur?" she asked sadly, standing quite still and fixing her mournful eyes on his. "Oh, why did you say it? for I shall never forget it."

"You did not think I meant it, love?" said the husband gently.

She paused for a moment, and then answered. "No, I don't think you did mean it, Arthur. If I thought that, if I thought that you did really believe I had meetings unknown to you with Mr. Hanlon, I fear I could never—no, I could never forgive you."

"Don't be so hard, Deirdrè. If I was angry it was because I love you; I can't bear to think of you caring for any other man."

To this bait Deirdrè did not rise, so Arthur went on more humbly—"Come, dear, come home." Still she did not move. "Oh, Deirdrè!" he cried, "for God's sake forgive me!"

Then she turned to him, and holding out her hand said, "Yes, Arthur, I forgive you, as I hope to be forgiven."

With many estimable persons forgiveness is a chilling process. The sinner, though pardoned, must be made to feel the enormity of his offence and the magnanimity of him who has pardoned him. Among these persons was Bellingham. He was magnanimous; therefore when his wife appealed to him after their domestic difficulties he always forgave her, but for a time he maintained a distant and superior demeanour, not because he bore the child any grudge, but because it was necessary for her moral welfare that she should have her

offence kept in remembrance. Such a course he considered was likely to prevent a repetition of the fault; sins too lightly condoned will probably be lightly repeated, so the sinner must be made to feel the humiliation of his fault.

There is, unfortunately, another side to this sound argument, and a possibility that the erring one may be again overcome by temptation, and may fail to seek a renewal of the pardon that was granted so grudgingly. None but a very humbleminded person would have asked Bellingham's pardon twice. But Mrs. Bellingham being—like too many of us—a sinner, and well aware of her delinquencies, drank the cup of repentance to the dregs after each fresh offence: drank it, but found the taste so bitter that when at length her husband sought forgiveness at her hands she gave him a draught of a very different quality. There was no lingering rancour about Mrs. Bellingham's forgiveness, no chilling sense of superiority. She forgave as she hoped to be forgiven, utterly and entirely—the offence was washed out as though it had never been. Only she was kinder, more loving, and more tender to her husband than she had been for months, and Bellingham found the evening after the stormy afternoon the happiest he had had since they returned from their ill-fated autumn tour.

And the young wife, outraged and insulted? Well, for her, too, this evening was a time of peace and rest. To be sinned against—ever so deeply—is better than to be sinning. For once Arthur was the prodigal, and his wife, in her heartfelt pity, made the rôle so pleasant that it was nothing short of an incentive to crime. She had trodden the thorny path of repentance so often that she stooped and gathered up the brambles lest they should wound her husband's feet as deeply as they had lacerated hers. You see she knew so well that she herself was wicked that she could not sit in the judgment seat, and Arthur's offence was so trifling compared with her own that it was but a small matter to forgive him.

That evening, at least, Bellingham felt no suspicion against his wife, but he loved her for her tenderness as dearly as he

had once loved her for her beauty. But with the cooler light of morning the event took another hue. The more he thought it over the more incredible it seemed to him that any woman could forgive the words that he had spoken unless she felt them to be deserved. Self-interest might have prompted her to grant a formal pardon and go back to her home, but no innocent woman could from her heart remit such an outrage as he had been guilty of on Deirdre's purity and good fame.

Yet when she came into the studio, the frank, honest look of her lovely face disarmed his suspicion. Hanlon, no doubt, was alone to blame, and she had forbidden him the house. He wished his wife would give him her confidence, but after his behaviour of yesterday he dared not ask for it. Then he thought that perhaps there was, after all, nothing between them—that the young man had merely tired of them, and that Deirdre's blushes were the result of a little natural pique. No, that would not do; her confusion had been too great and evident for that.

Suspicion once aroused, would not be quieted. The days of Bellingham's implicit trust in his wife were over, and an era of vague distrust and varying emotions set in. Sometimes he believed in her as of old, and conceived that wounded pride alone kept her from repudiating any regard for Hanlon; generally he thought they loved, but had agreed to part; at other times he distrusted the girl. In these moods he could not let her be out of his sight. If she went to early mass, he went with her, and when, looking round, he perceived that Hanlon was not of the congregation, he believed that she had had an assignation with the young man which his presence had frustrated. He left off going to the club, and if he went out did not tell her until he was on the point of starting. In every way he let her feel that she was suspected.

He felt that he was justified in acting thus, since Susan also evidently thought ill of Deirdre. He never knew that Susan

had also slandered him to his wife. On that subject the poor girl remained silent; she would not for the world let Arthur know that his sister could behave so ill to him, and Bellingham had no idea that his wife had more reason to suspect his fidelity than he had to mistrust hers.

All he wished was that he could see Hanlon and his wife together, and so soon as Lent set in he had that opportunity, for at the very first dance the Bellinghams went to in that penitential season they met young Hanlon.

Deirdrè did not change colour in the least when the young man came up and shook hands with an excess of cordiality. Bellingham could see that the youth was ill at ease, and that he escaped as soon as possible. He noticed also that Mr. Michael flirted rather desperately with various ladies, and that he never went near Deirdrè, though his eyes were often upon her. After that they met Hanlon repeatedly, but he was always too devoted to some young lady or other to speak to his older friends. Bellingham was at sea with regard to the youth, but his confidence in his wife returned by degrees.

Among other Lenten festivities the Bellinghams were bidden to a costume ball to be given by a friend of Arthur's who lived at Hampstead. It was to be a grand affair—historic costumes, and all the rest of it. The day that had been chosen, with some appropriateness, was the first of April.

"What a good day!" cried Arthur.

"It is the Wednesday in Passion Week," suggested Deirdrè.

Arthur magnanimously declared that if that was so she should do just as she liked about going. The truth was, he fancied some rather Bohemian personages might be there, and when the night came it was so bitterly cold and snowy that he was glad he had let her stay at home.

Bellingham was quite in his element; he knew that he looked very well in sixteenth-century costume. There was a little conscious pride in his manner when he came to beg his

wife to fasten his ruffles and perform the other little offices which nineteenth-century Elizabethans cannot perform for themselves.

Deirdrè was most admiring; she had never seen him look so well! She wished he would always wear trunk-hose. She was sure no one else would look so nice.

Arthur laughed, and said trunk-hose were chilly; but he felt very picturesque as he jumped into a cab, with a velvet mantle thrown round his shoulders, and his black silk legs very cold and exposed. The chilliness of his attire went far to reconcile him to the ugliness of modern dress. But in the ball-room he was warm enough, and spent one of the pleasantest evenings he ever remembered. Every one was saying how handsome he looked, and what a splendid, well-built man he was. All the prettiest women in the room danced with him. It was immensely jolly. The ladies had a charming freedom, very different to the prim propriety of her who ruled his home; but when after supper the freedom descended into rowdiness, Bellingham was glad he had left his little girl at home. Not that he disliked a little rowdiness on his own account, but it was not the kind of thing Deirdrè went in for.

It was nearly four o'clock before it occurred to him that it was time to go away. When he reached the hall-door there was quite a knot of people talking in a tone that denoted some disaster. "No cabs to be got," explained some one to Bellingham. "No," said another, "I've been waiting here half an hour." Several men started towards home in despair; and after a time Bellingham, in full sixteenth-century costume, and no wrap but a velvet cloak, was obliged to turn out into the cold. It had ceased snowing; the air was clear, but keen-cutting as a knife. In two minutes Bellingham was chilled to the bones, and by the time he came into the region of cabs he was so numbed and shivering that he could scarcely speak or move. The drive seemed to make him still colder, and he felt terribly ill when he reached his home. Deirdrè

had had a good fire made up in the study before she went to bed, and it was still alight, but there was no other fire in the house. Bellingham drank some brandy, and then stumbled upstairs and woke up his wife.

"Deirdrè," he said, "for heaven's sake wake up and help me to bed." His hands were so numbed that he could not undo the fastenings of his unaccustomed dress.

"Are you ill, Arthur?" cried the girl, waking up suddenly, and frightened by the pale face and trembling form. "Oh, how you are shivering!"

In an instant the slim white figure was alert, and soft warm hands were ministering to his needs. The first thing to be done was to get the sufferer into bed. So long as he complained only of cold and shivering, Deirdrè was not greatly frightened, but when the shivering gave place to a burning fever and he complained of pain in breathing, she became greatly alarmed. He seemed to get worse every moment, and when the doctor arrived he had no need to tell the physician what ailed him.

"It's your old complaint," said the doctor reassuringly, but he spoke more gravely to Mrs. Bellingham downstairs. It was, he said, a severe attack of inflammation of the lungs, and there were also other symptoms.

"But he has had these attacks before," pleaded the wife.

"I wish I could say that made the case less serious. I don't wish to alarm you, Mrs. Bellingham, but your husband is very seriously ill."

"Oh, doctor, there is not any danger?" she cried, looking at him with wild sad eyes. "Tell me there is not any danger!"

"I hope that with care he may recover, but——"

"You think that he will die?"

"I do not say that," replied the physician gently. "Indeed, I trust not, Mrs. Bellingham, but it is not fit you should be left alone. You must have some one with you. Let me go to Mrs. Stanley."

"Please, not Mrs. Stanley."

"Your husband will be less alarmed to see his sister than a stranger."

"As you will. You are very kind, doctor, but——"

"No, no, not kind at all. I need not tell you to be calm, Mrs. Bellingham."

Deirdrè shook her head; she was very far from calmness at that moment. It took her some little time to calm her face, but when she did go back to the sick-room her manner was at least as cheerful as usual.

"I thought you were never coming," whispered the invalid.

"Did you, dear? I am sorry, but there was nothing needful for sickness in the house,"—she had her husband's hand in hers and was stroking it—"no beef-tea or anything. I hope you won't mind what I've done, Arthur. You see I'm not clever in the house, and I'm so afraid you should not have everything nice, so I've asked Susan to come to see after it."

"Too much for you," whispered Arthur, pressing her hand.

"No, not too much, dear, only I don't wish to leave you. Now, if you will let me, I can stay with you all the time."

"Can Susan come?"

"To her sick brother! I should think so, Arthur. I never doubted it."

Mrs. Bellingham rose and went to the fireplace to make a hot poultice. "She must not think I manage you as badly as I do the house," she said tenderly as she went back to the bed.

And Mrs. Stanley did come; Deirdrè had only done her justice in supposing that nothing but necessity would keep her from her sick brother, for in the afternoon the bedroom door opened and Susan walked in. Arthur smiled and held out a feverish hand.

Deirdrè, too, tried to look pleased. "How good of you," she said, "to come so soon;" but she could not say she was glad.

"Of course I came at once. What a pulse, Arthur; you have not had such an attack as this for years! What have they been doing for you? Oh, I see, blisters—well, that may be enough. What have they given him to drink, Deirdre? Let me see his medicine."

"It's just time he had a dose now," said the wife, bringing it to him.

"Oh, you shouldn't raise him in that way, child! There, let me do it. So, Arthur. You see, my dear, you have no experience."

"No."

"What do you say, Arthur?" said Mrs. Stanley, bending down; "say it again, dear, a little louder."

"I like Deirdre's way best," said the sick man painfully. A look which was not merely mortified vanity crossed Susan's face.

"It is because I am his wife, dear Mrs. Stanley," said Deirdre, kindly. I see you do it far better than I; but he knows I should be grieved for any one else to nurse him, don't you, dear?"

"So soothing," murmured the invalid, to whom his sister was not soothing.

None of Deirdre's arrangements quite met with the approval of her sister-in-law. The room was a little too hot, the poultice a trifle too thick, the lemonade not sweet enough, the beef-tea made from only the second-best recipe; and though Arthur protested that his pillows were quite comfortable, Mrs. Stanley insisted on re-arranging them according to the strict rules of science. The household management she pronounced to be equally unsatisfactory—too much of this, too little of that; one thing not good enough in quality, the other sheer extravagance. Deirdre's anxiety made her indifferent to the state of her larder, but she felt herself utterly superseded, even in the sick-room.

Although Bellingham was in great suffering he saw and pitied his wife's humiliation, and constituted himself her

champion. She was so kind and tender to him, so loving and gentle, that his pain was less hard to bear than the remorse he felt for what now seemed to him his unkindness and neglect. But when night came the alarming symptoms increased so much and the fever ran so high that he forgot Deirdrè and all else in the struggle for life, and the two women laid aside their jealousies and dislikes in the sudden friendship of adversity.

CHAPTER XIV.

ARTHUR passed a terrible night, and though towards morning he had a short, disturbed sleep, from which he woke conscious and in less pain, he felt instinctively that he was no better. And this suspicion that he was dying he saw reflected in the doctor's face.

So he was not surprised when, after the physician had gone, Deirdre came into the room alone, and, taking his fevered hand in hers, said, "Arthur, my love, will you see Father Shanahan? He is downstairs."

Bellingham smiled. Ill as he was, he remembered that his wife had never called him "my love" before. He thought, too, that she had never before looked on him with such sweet devotion.

"You will see Father Shanahan, won't you, love?"

Bellingham shook his head, smiled again, and pressed the cool hand that was holding his. "Am I dying?" he asked faintly.

Just for a second the twitching of his wife's face and the heaving of her breast showed how desperate was her struggle to be calm, but her voice scarcely trembled as she answered, "I pray and trust not, dear; but Arthur, love, you are very ill, and you would feel happier if you had seen a priest, would you not, dear?" Bellingham shook his head. "One need not be dying, Arthur dear, to wish to make one's peace with God." She had been kneeling by her husband's bed, holding his hand in one of hers, while with the other she soothed his brow.

"Rather see Tapeson, dear," whispered the invalid.

"See who, my love?" said Deirdrè with a terrible feeling in her heart. For did not the name of that woman Susan had mentioned begin with T.

"Tapeson, the lawyer," repeated Arthur.

"Oh, Arthur, why? Of course, love, you shall see him if you wish it. But why not let Father Shanahan come up while I send for Mr. Tapeson?"

"I must see Tapeson first," he said with a great effort. "Deirdrè, I've done you an injustice. I can't bother about my soul till I have set it right."

"Please God, dear Arthur, you will be spared to me for many a year in which to set everything right. But, my love, if you wish to see Mr. Tapeson for my sake, if it be for my happiness, leave it till, if God will, you get well. Arthur, I suppose, dear, it is something about money that is on your mind. For my sake that need not grieve you. If you want, dearest, to please me, I would rather that you saw a priest than that—that—dear Arthur," she continued, struggling vainly with her sobs. "If you were to die money would not be——."

Arthur pressed the slim white hand. "Send for Tapeson, and if you like I will see the priest."

She kissed him tenderly, and then left the room. Soon she came back, bringing with her the priest. She and he knelt together by the bed, till after a time Deirdrè rose and went to her little sitting-room. Since her husband's illness, since she had known that he must leave her, she had not had a moment's time for thought. Neither by day nor night had she left the sick-room save for a few minutes to hear the doctor's opinion, or to give a necessary order to the servants. And now she could be alone only because the priest was there hearing the last confession of a soul that seemed but little fitted to quit this world. Deirdrè had no time to think of herself at all, neither of her sins nor of her sorrows. She fell on her knees, and prayed in an agony for him who had so

little time, so little strength, to pray for himself; but in a moment the sound of the door opening aroused her.

"Your husband wants you, Mrs. Bellingham." It was Father Shanahan who spoke.

"He is worse?" She waited for no answer. In a moment she was at Arthur's side. Susan Stanley entered the room at the same moment.

"Carina," said Bellingham, putting out his hand, and then he repeated some words she could not understand.

"He takes you for his first wife," explained Mrs. Stanley. "He thinks you can't understand English."

"Ah, if I could only speak Italian! He wants me to answer him. What shall I say? See, when I speak English he calls for Andreina. Arthur, dear, do you not understand?"

"Chiamami Andreina, vorrei l'Andreina."

"Oh, Father Shanahan, tell me what to say. Mrs. Stanley, help me—help me, Mrs. Stanley."

"He will think you are Andreina," said Mrs. Stanley, while Father Shanahan tried to recall his long-disused Italian.

"What does it matter who he thinks me, so that he is happy."

"Oh, Andreina! Andreina vieni!"

Father Shanahan whispered some words to the girl.

"Eccomi, caro. Ecco' carissimo."

Arthur started up at the sound of the words, the foreign accent and the silvery voice, so unlike Andreina's guttural tone. "Ah, it's Deirdrè," he said, "little Deirdrè, poor little maid," and then he sank back exhausted.

He never spoke after that, though for long anxious hours he lay breathing heavily. He did not suffer, the doctor said, for he was unconscious; but to Deirdrè that was little consolation. To her any agonised consciousness would be better than that sad ignorance that the last hour was come. There was now no nursing to be done; nothing to do but to watch and wait and pray, till at length Bellingham gave one gasp, one sigh, and then the doctor said, "It is over," and Father

Shanahan prayed no longer for the soul that was departing, but for the soul that was fled.

The silence, now that that laboured breathing had ceased, was very terrible; but the dead stillness when the priest ceased to pray was almost more than Deirdrè could bear. She still knelt by the bedside, holding the dead man's hand in her own, and praying desperately for the soul that was before its Judge.

At length Mrs. Stanley's voice broke the silence. "Deirdrè," she said softly.

"Leave me. Don't speak to me, please," said the widow calmly, and then the others left the room.

How long she knelt there she knew not. Her soul was before the throne of heaven, craving mercy for him who had so suddenly been called to his account. But it was dusk when Mrs. Stanley entered, followed by a neat, quiet-looking woman dressed in black.

"Who are you?" cried the girl, with wild flashing eyes. Who was this that had intruded into that sacred chamber?

"I am come to lay the poor gentleman out, my dear."

The revulsion of feeling was too great. Deirdrè gave a little hard laugh and then she fell unconscious on the floor.

It was the best thing that could have befallen the poor creature; it was an unspeakable relief to Mrs. Stanley, who had feared some resistance from her. She did not understand Deirdrè, but she knew her well enough to surmise that everything that had to be done she would wish to do herself. But this faintness made all so easy, for when consciousness returned the death-chamber had been prepared and set in order.

"I want to go back to him," cried the widow, her face as strained and livid as the face of death itself. She put her hand on the door—the door of her own bedroom—and went into the familiar chamber where she had battled with so many griefs, shed so many tears. Then, as she went in, a sense of strangeness came upon her: this room was like her own, still it

was changed as a well-known face seen in a dream. There was a faint, an unaccustomed smell of incense, and the room was lighted by two candles placed on each side of the crucifix that stood on her prayer-table by the bedhead. That was not the usual place for the table, and before this night the room had always been lighted from the other end by gas. The chairs, the tables, all were placed with a prim pure neatness, and there was no fire in the grate. Everything looked neat and cold. Deirdre's eyes noted these things before she dared look towards the bed. That was more changed than all. That rigid whiteness, that grim stiff form, filled her with terror and dismay. Her life-long dread of death came back to her with overwhelming force; she trembled and her heart stood still with fear; even with Susan at her side she hardly had the courage to remain in that strange familiar room. Her chin fell like the chin of the dying; she could not lift her grey, nerveless hands.

"Susan," she said, "let me see his face."

Susan started at that voice that was so unlike the voice of Deirdre. Those shivering, inarticulate tones, those indistinct sounds that were hardly words, those trembling moans and chattering teeth, were strangely unlike the calm voice and face that had surprised Mrs. Stanley through those anxious days. The sight of the placid, unaltered face would, she thought, quiet the widow's terrors and calm her nerves. She turned the sheet from the still white face, the face with its closed awful eyes, its set, contemptuous smile.

"Arthur!" cried the wife, in horror, "Arthur, how can you look at me like that? Have you no pity, no compassion?"

"Deirdre, my love," said Mrs. Stanley, "he is dead."

"But he can hear me. Arthur, my dear, you hear me, hear me! Oh, Arthur, forgive me! See, Arthur, how much God has forgiven you. Forgive me, oh forgive me! Speak to me, Arthur—one word, one word—a cruel word, but speak to me a word. How can you rest like that! Arthur, forgive, forgive as you are forgiven."

--"My dear child! Hush, my dear, this is death."

"Do they always look like that?" she cried, turning to Mrs. Stanley. "Have they always that cruel smile? Are their eyes always closed against us in displeasure? No, no; I know it is not so; it can't be so. It is that I have sinned and he has not forgiven. Oh! I have done a thousand things that I am sorry for. Hear, Arthur, hear! listen and forgive me!"

"Do you remember, Arthur," she went on, "the last time I had a dead man's hand in mine? Now I take yours. Oh, it is cold! how cold! That was my father's hand. He stretched it up to me out of the grave, Arthur, because he loved me and wished to take my hand again. Yours lies upon your heart—on your own heart—the heart that is as cold now as your hand——"

"Come away, Deirdrè; it is not fit, my dear, that you should be here."

"No; I shall stay here till he has pardoned me. I shall know—yes, I shall know when he has forgiven me. See, Arthur, I shall stay and pray for you—for your dear soul. When God sees fit he will bid you forgive me, too."

"There, dear," said Mrs. Stanley, moving the lights, "see, he has forgiven you; his face is not cruel now."

"It is the same—not cruel, only stern. It is no use to move the lights, Susan. I am not mad. It is the truth that he is angry. Go down and get some supper; you must be tired and worn out; but I, I shall stand here until he has forgiven me."

For hours she stood there, silent and wan, her pale lips moving unceasingly in prayer. At last she bent and kissed the icy face. "God bless and keep you, love," and then, turning to Mrs. Stanley, with a sad smile, she said, "Look, Susan, he has forgiven me."

Mrs. Stanley rose from her seat and saw that the dead man's lips had fallen, and that the sneer was gone.

It was past midnight, but Mrs. Bellingham would not go to

bed. She did not like him to be left with no one to watch and pray by him. She begged her sister-in-law to rest, but Mrs. Stanley did not dare leave the distracted creature there alone.

"But you must be so tired, Susan ; go, dear, and sleep."

"I shall not leave you, Deirdrè."

"Then we will stay and pray together. Susan, please pray out loud ; I have no thoughts."

Mrs. Stanley opened a book. She did not know her place in it, but after a long search she found and read the prayers for the departed, and Deirdrè, still kneeling by the bedside, strove to keep her thoughts on the words, but in vain. Her mind, worn out by its exaltation and the intensity of its strain, could do no more. One of the candles stood in a little draught, and Deirdrè watched its swailing and its flickering till Mrs. Stanley's "Amen" aroused her with a start. She covered her eyes with her hands. Still her mind wandered. Arthur's watch lay on the table ; how loud it ticked. Soon it would stop, unless it were wound again. What would she not give to be as anxious as she had been when she wound it up last night ! Now she should never be anxious any more. And Arthur would never need his watch again ; no, he was dead, dead, dead ! Yet, while she was saying this to herself, it would not have surprised the widow to hear her husband's step on the stairs, to see him come into the room in the glow of health and strength. Indeed, she found herself wondering that Arthur did not come to console her in her sore distress. If Mrs. Stanley's thoughts were as far from her prayers as were Deirdrè's, that midnight watching can have done little for the dead man's soul.

At length Mrs. Bellingham ceased to think at all. Susan addressed her, and she did not answer. She did not move when Mrs. Stanley touched the hand that was as cold as the one she still grasped : her head had fallen on the bed, for she had sunk into a deep trance-like sleep.

When she awoke it was daylight, and she was lying in the

spare room. How came she there? Why was she not sleeping in her own bed? Oh, God! how fearfully it was tenanted. Arthur was dead! he was dead! Then she remembered all her trouble, and how her husband had gone from her and left her alone in the world. But she had been kneeling by his bed; she could remember that. How came she here? Perhaps she had been ill; perhaps they had buried him—had taken him away from her without a last farewell. She sprang up and listened. There was a sound of muffled feet, a lumbrous stillness, men's hoarse, hushed voices in the next room. Were they taking him away? She was so feeble she could hardly stand. Ah! she must have been ill. She tottered to the door, and somehow stumbled across the passage to the dreaded room. But the room was unchanged; the white sheet still draped the rigid form; only strange men were there—strange indifferent men in the presence of the sacred dead.

"Come away, dear," said Mrs. Stanley's voice; "go back to bed, my dear."

"What are they doing, those men, Susan? You should not let people go to look at him; he would not like it."

"They are obliged to go, dear."

"Why?"

"They are measuring him, dear, for his coffin."

"Oh! it is best to be murdered and thrown in a pit. This is terrible!"

"How can you say such dreadful things, Deirdre?"

"It is this that is dreadful, Susan: these men and these women coming round our dear ones that are dead. We seem to have no right in them, even for the few days they are left to us; these people come and turn them into strangers; these men go to the room that even we do not enter with shoes upon our feet. We are not even left alone with our grief."

Mrs. Stanley thought the girl was ill; she tried to persuade her to go back to bed, but the widow begrudged every

moment spent away from her husband's side, and with weak, trembling hands began to dress herself. Susan stayed with her and tried to help her, till the maid knocked at the door and called Mrs. Stanley outside to whisper that the dress-maker had come.

"She may as well come up, may she not, Deirdrè, to measure you?"

"Measure me?" said Deirdrè in a bewildered way. "It was Arthur they were measuring."

"But for your dress, my dear."

"My dress? Oh, yes, I had forgotten; no, Susan, I can't be measured; she must make it from an old one. I shall not care about the fit," she added quietly.

"I will go and give her the instructions," said her sister-in-law, leaving the room.

Deirdrè let her head fall on her hands. She was revolted by this ceremony of woe. Had all sorrow its sordid side—was the sacredness of mourning always defiled like this? Why should she have new clothes because she was in sorrow? Life seemed to be all ceremony and clothes; in that at least it is like death, she said bitterly. And just then the maid brought her a basket of white flowers—jonquils and hyacinths. "Mr. Stanley sent 'em, mum." Deirdrè took the basket and looked at the flowers, and then she shed her first tears of widowhood. Just such white flowers as these she had had for her wedding not a year ago.

"What are they for, these flowers? What have I to do with flowers now?"

"Oh, mum," said the maid, "they're to put in master's room."

Deirdrè smiled another bewildered smile. She took up the basket and went to her husband's room, and laid the white spring flowers on his bed. She was doing this when Mrs. Stanley came in to her.

"How nice they look," said the elder lady.

"Do they?" asked Deirdrè in the dreamy way that had

come over her since her husband's death. "Do they look nice? I think, Susan, they make him look less than ever like Arthur. It is, I suppose, to get us used to the thought of parting with them that they make people look so little like themselves. I should hardly know this to be Arthur. I can hardly believe it is. Don't you remember, Susan, how he lay while he was ill, on his side, with his right hand under his cheek and his left outside the clothes? He always slept like that, on his right side; never like this, straight out and stiff. I wish they would have left him more like himself."

"Don't talk like that, Deirdre," cried Mrs. Stanley. "He looks as the dead always look."

She was shocked by Deirdre's way of speaking. Yet it was merely that they looked at the event from different standpoints. To Mrs. Stanley a corpse was a corpse, and Arthur, though her brother, was before all things a corpse. To Deirdre Arthur was Arthur; dead or alive, he was above all things Arthur. She never knew how much pain Mrs. Stanley's presence saved her; she never thought of the arrangements that must be made. The elder lady undertook all that, and the widow was free to weep and pray in her husband's chamber. She passed all her days there and much of her nights, growing hourly thinner, more pale and wan. The rigid form under the sheet inspired her with an awful dread, a terror she knew not of what, a revival of all her childish fears. Sometimes as she knelt and prayed she was like to go mad with sheer fear and the solemn silence and darkness. But she did not tell Mrs. Stanley that she was frightened; to watch with Arthur was the least she could do for him, and that strange awesome thing was Arthur, or at least all of him that was left to her.

But changed as he was, dreadful though it had been to stay alone with him in the night hours, she did not feel her desolation till the black day when they covered his face for the last time and took him to his grave. She had gone with him; her one idea was to be to the end with the husband she had not

loved, and Mrs. Stanley had tried in vain to dissuade her from this. In truth, she was not fit for the exertion. From the first moment of Arthur's illness she had hardly eaten or slept, and since his death she had passed the time for the most part in an ecstasy of prayer. But she insisted on going; she must be with him to the end, she said. Mrs. Stanley dreaded that day, dreaded the moment when the new crape clothes should make the girl understand that her widowhood was not a dream. But Deirdrè did not observe her dress or her black veil; she was quiet and still. Throughout the dreadful day her thoughts were with Arthur and her God. Hers were the only dry eyes that were round her husband's grave; but the tears that were shed there were less for him that was gone than for the piteous sight of the widow nineteen years old, worn, thin, and faded to a shadow, with her sad, calm face sadder than any tears.

CHAPTER XV.

WE have really hardly seen Michael Hanlon since we witnessed that farewell between him and the Bellinghams at Galway station, though from time to time we have met him in society.

I am afraid that Hanlon was not at his best. His even spirits deserted him, and he varied between unpleasant extremes of hilarity and depression. Even his mother, who was disposed to consider him perfect, thought that his English friends had had a bad influence over him when, after leaving Galway, he returned for a few days to Limerick before settling down again in London. Never had Mrs. Hanlon heard her son laugh so loud or so harshly; never in the whole of the five-and-twenty years she had known him had she heard him make so many sharp speeches, so many slighting remarks about home. Nothing pleased him: the parlour was stuffy, the bedroom cold, the bed like a sack of potatoes—tired as he was, he had not slept a wink. Even the father, that fetish which Mrs. Hanlon had taught her children to join her in worshipping, lost his sacred character. That sad and suffering saint no longer existed in Michael's mind; in his place stood a peevish, nervous, idle, self-indulgent man, who let his wife work for him and his children pay his debts. His son could scarcely refrain from speaking crossly to the father he had so long and unquestioningly revered.

As for Miss Dolan—Kate Dolan of the curling locks, the laughing teeth, and modest mien—her charm was gone. Limerick was the enchanted city no longer, but a ruined, dirty town, poverty-stricken, and inhabited by third-rate

people. Kitty's brogue, once so sweet, grated on his ear; her jokes jarred, and the speaking eyes he had so much admired—the speaking eyes were vulgar, and their allurements the small change of an unaccomplished flirt. Perhaps poor Kitty had been, in an innocent way, a flirt; perhaps she had encouraged somewhat too impartially young Hanlon and young Quin; but now that Michael was so cold and distant, her heart had no further waverings. It was Michael and Michael only that she loved, and Larry Quin was odious to her. Poor Larry was more than ever in love with Kate, and who shall say that Mary Galaher, up Gallows Green way, was not weeping for Larry, for all that John Mangan was making such violent love to her. The young people at Limerick were playing a game of cross purposes that autumn, but the cruel sport was such a heartbreaking pastime, and it was so sad to see fair-haired Mary and merry Kate pale and red-eyed, that I think we will leave the city on the Shannon, and follow our crossgrained young novelist to London.

Dingy as Limerick had been, squalid and second-rate, it was a golden city compared to Shepherd's Bush—Shepherd's Bush that Michael had so often vaunted as a "nice part." It did not seem at all a nice part now, and that made Hanlon see that the change was not in the world, but in himself. So he wrote a very loving and penitent letter to his mother—a letter that the good woman kissed and cried over, and that went a great deal nearer breaking her heart than all Mick's crossness and sharp speeches had done. There is always something amiss when the full-fledged birds are so fond, so abnormally fond, of the nest. That Mick, with his great mind and grand London ways, would grumble a bit at home was not surprising; but this letter, more homesick and loving than any since the first round-hand, much blotted letter little Mick had sent from school, showed that something grave was wrong. And what could there be troubling Michael? It must be that that heartless Kitty Dolan had thrown him over.

Mrs. Hanlon immediately discovered many hitherto unsuspected flaws in Miss Dolan's character.

Michael being in this desperate, unhappy mood, was disposed to quarrel with whosoever crossed his path, and as ill-luck would have it he chose to fall foul of the very last person a young writer should fall foul of, namely, his publisher. He was convinced his publisher was making a very unfair profit out of him. It was impossible that the half profit from the six months' sale of his successful "Short History of the Mahati Tribes" should be one pound two and elevenpence halfpenny. That book over which he had spent so much time and for which he had made such infinite research; that book which in so light a manner touched on all the salient points of the Mahati character, and made the history so clear and so inevitable. The book, too had been so well reviewed in the *Athenæum*, the *Saturday*, and even in the *Times*. The account made Hanlon furious. It was his brains that enabled Mr. Pamphlet to live in Cavendish Square. One pound two and elevenpence halfpenny! It made a man mad to think of it. This was not, however, Hanlon's only grievance against his publishers. The sale of the history was accounted for, but of the novel, which its author felt convinced was in its second, if not its third edition, there was no account rendered; and the final touch was put to Hanlon's wrath by a gracious letter from Mr. Pamphlet himself, offering Michael a commission to write a short history of the aboriginal tribes of the Congo, and adding that as the subject would appeal to a larger public, though still a limited one, than had the "History of the Mahatis," he would buy the copyright for the sum of five pounds. A quarter of an hour after receiving this offer, Michael was swinging along in a towering rage towards Credo Square, where Messrs. John Pamphlet & Co. had their offices.

"Is Mr. Pamphlet in?" asked Hanlon fiercely of the office-boy.

"I'll go and see, sir," said the lad, glad to be out of sight

of those flashing eyes. "Please step this way, sir. Mr. Pamphlet will be at liberty in a minute, sir," he announced on his return.

Hanlon sat down in a glass cage to nurse his wrath. His temper was little improved by a wait of three-quarters of an hour. "Quite time, too," he muttered to himself, when at length the lad announced that Mr. Pamphlet would see him now.

There was no sign of hurry or business about the publisher, little of the manner of a man with whom time means money, and the voice with which he greeted Hanlon was full of friendliness and pleasure.

"Well, now, this is kind," he cried, rising languidly from his chair. "Get down, pussy. Puss makes me quite her slave," he said with a gentle smile, as he held out his hand to his visitor. "Here, Brown, just let Mr. Dilke know that Mr. Hanlon is here. Sit down, Hanlon, in that chair, and draw up to the fire. How cold it is for October. East wind, I think," he went on blandly, as he rubbed his soft, long hands over the kindling blaze. "Oh, pussy, up again. Naughty pussy!"

Pussy put a furry paw on Michael's knee.

"What, will you go to Mr. Hanlon? Intrusive cat!"

Pussy, a Persian tabby, was irresistible. Hanlon had meant to snub her, but when she rubbed her cheek against his sleeve he could not refrain from giving her a gentle stroke. "Isn't she a beauty? We brought her from Paris with us last month. A fine trouble we had with her; didn't we, Miss Puss? Never be induced, Hanlon, to——. Ah, Dilke, here's Hanlon!"

"How do?" said Dilke, the junior partner, stretching out a chilly hand. "Well, Pamphlet——"

"My dear fellow, draw up. That's right. Now this is what I call pleasant;" and Mr. John Pamphlet, throwing back his head, indulged in a quiet, amiable laugh, whilst he drew his hand softly along the cat's back and up her bushy tail.

"It was upon business that I came," began Hanlon.

"Ah, business. Yes. By the way, Hanlon, is it true (I hope it is not true) that you were on the platform of the Land League meeting at Bermondsey last Tuesday? That sort of thing, if once it gets known, will ruin your career; won't it, pussy?"

"I've often been to Land League meetings, but I wasn't there on Tuesday. What I came for was to ask about the novel."

"Ho! ho! ho! I beg your pardon, Hanlon, but you look too funny with puss just whisking her tail in front of your nose. Rude pussy, to turn your back to the gentleman! There, that's better; turn your tail to your old master. I beg pardon, Hanlon, I'm afraid I was as rude as puss. You were saying that Parnell——"

"I was not mentioning Parnell at all. I ——."

"No, to be sure; it was the League in general we were discussing. Dilke was at a meeting some time ago, and was not at all favourably impressed. You thought the whole thing humbug, didn't you, Dilke?"

"Then you formed a very wrong impression," began Hanlon, turning towards the junior partner.

"Mr. Duffin," announced Brown.

"Tell Mr. Duffin I'll see him in a minute," interpolated Pamphlet. "Well, Dilke thought it humbug; didn't you, Dilke?"

"Arrant bluster; the harangue of half a score of paid agitators," said Dilke, laconically.

"Indeed, they are not paid. I can't think how that misapprehension arises," began Hanlon, eagerly; and then he launched forth into a stream of Irish politics, the publisher keeping up his ardour by a judiciously inserted question here and there.

"Please, sir," interrupted Brown, once more, "Mr. Duffin says as he can't wait any longer, and——"

"Oh, hang Duffin," said Pamphlet, mildly. "What a bore the fellow is; but I must see him. Show Mr. Duffin

in, Brown. What a nuisance! Dilke, I'm afraid I must ask you to stop, too. Good-bye, Hanlon. So good of you to come. Mind, come and look me up again soon. Ah, Duffin!" and then Brown piloted the unlucky Hanlon down the passages and showed him out at the front door.

Hanlon pulled out his watch. He had spent an hour and a quarter in Credo Square. Was the talk that had been going on while he was waiting as purposeless as that which had detained the hapless Duffin? Probably. Hanlon would have said certainly, only that his mind harboured a doubt whether Mr. John Pamphlet had really been at the office at all when he first arrived; and, indeed, a brougham, singularly like that owned by the publisher, had left Cavendish Square about five minutes after Hanlon had taken his seat in the glass cage.

By this time it was past one. The best of the working day was wasted, and Hanlon was too hopelessly annoyed to be able to make use of what remained of it. When he got home he wrote a hurried note to Pamphlet, absolutely refusing to have anything to say to the aboriginal tribes of the Congo for five pounds, and demanding an account for the novel. In a few days he heard from Dilke that the sale of the novel was unaccountably small, and that the book had been, so far, a dead loss to the publisher. For this misfortune he was unable to account, as the work was one of exceptional merit; but as, unfortunately, they had to look on books from an exclusively business point of view, he feared they could not in future offer Mr. Hanlon such advantageous terms as they had been in the habit of giving him.

Mr. Hanlon's answer, written in a moment of anger, rendered impossible any further dealings between himself and the firm of John Pamphlet and Company. His indignation lasted until he had dropped his letter into the post; then he began to feel very miserable, for after all any publisher is better than none, and before Pamphlet had taken him up Michael used to spend a good deal in postage stamps for manuscripts which were returned by firm after firm without,

as their author felt convinced, being so much as unpacked. In those old light-hearted days the return of the manuscript which Messrs. So-and-So feared would not be a successful novel or history in their hands, had seemed a very endurable trial; not even the criticisms and strictures on his style which from time to time accompanied his returned short stories (never the long ones) depressed him greatly. But he now began to wish that he had disposed of the novel he was then finishing before he quarrelled with his publisher; and though he assured himself that he was now too well known to meet with his old rebuffs, he felt anxious and miserable after he had sent his parcel to Hereules Loftie and Co.

For three weeks he remained in suspense. Then came an envelope with Loftie's name stamped on the back. Hanlon felt hot, and sick, and faint when he opened it, and his heart sank as he saw the words, "We should have been very——" So it was a refusal. "Dear Sir," it began; and Hanlon saw with dismay that there were four pages of most candid criticism.

"Dear Sir,—We entrusted the reading of your novel, 'The Adventures of Alice Travers,' to a writer of fiction of very high standing, and profoundly acquainted with the rules of style and composition. We are sorry to say that his verdict is not encouraging. He strongly disapproves of the attempt at facetiousness which characterises the earlier chapters, and which results in a series of far-fetched jokes. The sensation of the third volume is equally unpleasing. The work also contains grave inaccuracies in the delineation of character. We should have been very pleased to have taken the work up, but with this candid report before us we regret that we cannot make the venture even on the reasonable terms you suggest. We return the MS. by book-post to-day.

"With thanks, we are,

"Yours faithfully,

"HEREULES LOFTIE & Co."

Hanlon felt as though he had had a blow in the face ; he read the letter two or three times before he quite understood it. He had never been so severely treated. This was a thousand times worse than having the thing returned unread. Facetiousness ? It was a quality he abhorred. He reread the first volume ; he could not see a joke, far-fetched or otherwise, in the whole thing. It seemed to him that the tale had deteriorated since he read it last, but whatever it was it was not funny. No, the last thing he would have called it was funny.

Hanlon thought he would next try his own countrymen, Duff and Ross, of Dublin. After ten days Duff and Ross wrote to him saying that they had read his manuscript with pleasure ; they thought it showed distinct talent, but, if they might be allowed to say so, talent misapplied to fiction. There was a solidity and seriousness about the style, and at the same time a lucidity and terseness, which suggested to them that in the compilation of Blue Books, and the epitomising of parliamentary reports, Mr. Hanlon's talents would be better employed than in a frivolous occupation which was unworthy of him. With this barren compliment, Duff and Ross begged to remain his, very truly.

Hanlon did not even unpack the novel this time ; he merely redirected it, and sent it to Hunter Garlick, a new publisher, who was only just beginning life, and might, Michael devoutly hoped, be anxious to obtain young writers of promise. After his recent misfortunes Hanlon had to assure himself very often that he was a writer of promise.

On the second morning after he had dispatched the unlucky novel, Hanlon, at the hour of half-past ten, was still at his breakfast when Mrs. Smith brought him in a card with "Mr. Hunter Garlick" printed on it in small Gothic type. "Hunter Garlick," gasped Hanlon, with an overwhelming consciousness of slippers, dressing-gown, and tobacco-smoke. "Show the gentleman up," and in a minute a small, fair, nervous-looking man of thirty appeared.

"I am—so sorry—to be—so early," began the publisher, in little timid gasps; "but——"

"Not at all," cried Hanlon, "it's I who am late. I'm awfully ashamed, but I was dancing till six, nearly."

"Ah, you happy literary men can keep your own hours—choose your own time for work. Well, yes; I will have a cup of tea, thank you. Tea—is always welcome to me. I daresay you wonder why I am here," he continued when Mrs. Smith had brought a cup and closed the door.

"I hope 'tis to offer me a good round sum for my novel," said Hanlon, laughing. "Sugar?"

"No, not sugar. Not quite that. In fact, I came to ask you your opinion as to the—the er—merits of the work. You see a new firm—new house—has to be very particular. Now, candidly, should you advise me to—to er—publish it. Pamphlet & Co., if I mistake not, used to do business with you?"

"They did; but I have quarrelled with them. They have not refused the book, if that's what you are thinking."

Hunter Garlick felt there was something behind this. "But er—excuse me, Mr. Hanlon, I—I can hardly think you would—would honour me so—so much as to to give me the er—not, you know, the first refusal of it. Now what—what made you er—in fact, think of me?"

"It has been refused by Duff and Ross and by Loftie. No one else but yourself has seen it. I thought you might like to have young men. That was why I sent it to you. Some sort of idea of putting new wine into new bottles."

"Well, now you mention it, there is—there is a good deal in that." Mr. Garlick began to laugh softly to himself. "I call that very, very good—'new wine in new bottles.' I shall remember that. It is very good. Only," he added with a consciousness of having also said something clever, "you know, Mr. Hanlon, one must—one must be sure of the wine."

"And of the bottles."

"Ah, you are too sharp for me, much too sharp. You Irish gentlemen are always so witty, too witty for me. I

can't keep pace with you at all. Your book, though, did not strike me as being so—humorous." Hanlon's amused face saved him from saying witty. "It is too—too tragic; much too tragic, I fear, for the English taste. Now you know, Mr. Hanlon, every one comes to a bad end in that novel; every one dies. Now that is not—not what I should call true to nature; it's overdone. It is not necessary that every one should die."

"I never heard of anyone since Elias who did not," cried Hanlon. "Life is tragic, you know, Mr. Garlick; we all have to die, and we most of us come to a sad end."

"But in fiction, which should above all things be entertaining, I don't think people like death and sorrow; these should be—be hid or touched on lightly. Now I wept when I read your book."

"Indeed; I am very much flattered to hear it."

"Yes, I wept—more than once; but I don't know what to—to say, Mr. Hanlon, about it paying. People must—people, you know, like to laugh. I prefer to laugh myself."

"Well, and so do I." Hanlon was laughing then.

"Now, really! Who could have thought it from your book? but—I am really a little afraid of it. How would it be if you were to change—just the end?—rewrite just the third volume in a more cheerful strain. I should then—then, I think, I might venture to—to take it if you will halve the expense; but as it is—I—I really am afraid. It is, you know, a great expense. Three volumes, and the risk. I will publish it as it stands for you at, you know, your risk."

"No, I can't afford that. I write to make money, Mr. Garlick, not to pay it."

"Well, then about—the alteration; now are you disposed to make that?"

"Not yet. Do you know, I have still eighteen chances? I shall try them all before I change a single word. Nevertheless, I'm awfully obliged to you for coming this long way, and for consulting me; it is really kind."

"No," Mr. Garlick said, "it was not kind at all." And after fidgetting nervously on the edge of his chair for a few minutes longer, he went away, leaving Hanlon with one hope the less.

His next attempt was also a failure; but this time the MS. was returned in the time-honoured fashion, Messrs. Thirst and Whackett regretting that they feared Mr. Hanlon's novel would not prove a success in their hands.

It was while his manuscript was going this dreary round that Hanlon went to those evening parties at which we saw him flirting so much more than was at all heroic or becoming in a gentleman suffering from an unfortunate love affair. Indeed, Hanlon felt that he was undignified in this matter, but he must have some amusement and find some means of forgetting that his heart was broken and his pocket empty. Doubtless chatting with Miss Butler was not the most likely way to forget Mrs. Bellingham, but both Hanlon and the young lady looked to those talks as the pleasantest bits of the winter season. Michael would never have mentioned Mrs. Bellingham—she was too dear and too painful a subject—but Miss Butler, whose bright eyes saw everything, was quite aware that her friendship with Deirdrè was her chief attraction in Michael's mind; and as she wished to make herself pleasant to him she generally brought the talk round to the subject which she suspected was most interesting to the young man. She told him a great deal about Deirdrè, about her past and her position; much that Michael had already heard from dearer lips, but some things that were new to him. She told him, too, how Deirdrè was looking, how impassive she was growing; and she even hinted that the Bellinghams' marriage was not a happy one.

Miss Rose had no compunction in thus discussing her friend—she would have discussed her parents just as coolly, and they would have discussed her; but that little hint of hers—that sadly and sympathetically expressed doubt whether poor Deirdrè were happy in her marriage—recalled Michael to himself. He resolved that he would never again mention her

either to Rose or any one else. She would, he knew, dislike such gossiping, and her wish should be sacred to him. The next time he met Miss Butler he kept that resolution, but later he gave way, though the young lady, seeing she had made a mistake, never again discussed any very private affairs of the Bellinghams.

It was after one of these talks with Miss Butler that Hanlon found his novel returned from Le Marchant and Ward and in a moment of desperation sent it off to the very first publisher he could think of. Of course he would refuse it, but as everyone refused it, it did not much matter whom it was sent to first. But this time the novel was accepted: accepted, too, on terms so much more liberal than Pamphlet had ever given that Hanlon felt as though he were doing something mean in accepting them. He ought to tell the publishers that his last book had failed. But he did not tell them. He accepted Messrs. So-and-So's offer with elaborate indifference. After all it was their risk; they need not have taken the thing unless they wished.

And "the thing" paid very well. Despite Mr. Garlick's prophecy, a great number of ladies who had nothing of their own to grieve about shed tears over the misfortunes of Michael's people, who were, in truth, about the most afflicted puppets that ever danced upon an author's stage.

Hanlon himself, who was the author of their misery, could not read of their sorrows unmoved, and wept over the proofs when he came to that affecting passage wherein the heroine, having married the wrong man, bids farewell to all she loves and sails with her villainous husband to Australia, in which country she meets with a fate more mysterious and tragic than that which befell poor L. E. L.

Hanlon, surrounded by his proof sheets, was forgetting his own griefs in these imaginary sorrows of his own creating, when Mrs. Smith entered and told him that a gentleman wished to see him "most pertickler," and she handed in Charlie Dawn's card.

"Show him in," said Michael, still more with Alice Travers on the steamer than in his parlour at Shepherd's Bush ; and thus, before he had time to wonder what should have brought Dawn so far beyond the outskirts of society, the young man entered.

"I see you know," cried Dawn, looking at Hanlon's face, which was still sad from the woes of Alice Travers.

"Know what?" asked Hanlon.

"Ah, then, you've not heard?"

Hanlon shook his head. "I have heard nothing; I've not stirred out to-day."

"I've bin flying round all afternoon, tellin' friends," said Dawn; "Bellingham's dead!"

"Good God!" cried Hanlon, turning ashy white. "Is that so?"

Then Dawn explained, in his languid easy voice, how he had chanced to call on Deirdrè the day before yesterday, and had been told, at the door, of Bellingham's dangerous illness, and that he had been again to-day and had heard that he had been only a few minutes dead. "Made me feel quite queah, my deah fellow," Hanlon heard the young poet saying; "made me feel quite queah, I ashaw you."

Hanlon did not answer, and Dawn went on descanting on the youth and beauty of the widow, her probable circumstances, and speculating as to whether she would or would not be inconsolable. Michael scarcely heard a word of all his talk, he was so shocked, so grieved, so stunned. I am glad to say that it did not occur to him just then to think that Deirdrè would be free.

At last Dawn, finding his eloquence wasted, went away to spread the news in other quarters, and Hanlon was free to think of his dear lady's sorrow, of her bleeding heart, and of the dead man who had once been his friend. From these thoughts he was quickly roused by the entrance of Mrs. Smith, who came to tell him that Tommy was back from school, and would, if Mr. 'anlon was busy, take his letters to post. The

letters would be ready in a moment, Hanlon said, and he tried to return to the griefs of Alice Travers, but that lady now seemed so intensely stupid that her creator wondered if any living creature would be found to take a passing interest in her history. As for shedding tears over her—bah! no one would be so foolish.

In this Mr. Hanlon was mistaken; and, indeed, in later years, when he lifted her story from a top shelf, Michael felt very sorrowful when he came to her voyage to Australia; but whether that sorrow was for Alice or for the memory of the long-passed day when he had heard of Arthur's death I cannot tell, for in truth he did not know himself.

CHAPTER XVI.

AMONG those who stood round Bellingham's grave no one was sadder than James Butler. The sight of the woebegone young widow, with her wan haggard face and her almost childish figure, wrung his very heart, and he could not forget that it was not yet a year since he had given the girl to the man by whose coffin he now stood. With many misgivings he had given his ward to the husband twenty-three years older than herself. Yes; he remembered now how his heart had failed him at the sight of the young bride who looked so much too young to be a wife. It seemed much more than a year since that day, and the widow's face looked many and many a year older than the face of the bride had done; but the sad part of this was that the change had not come entirely since Bellingham's death, for she had looked sad and aged before she had been three months a wife. These thoughts passed through Butler's mind as he stood at his friend's grave, and the suspicion that the mourning widow had been a sorrowful wife added to his grief. He could not free himself from a feeling of responsibility with regard to this young girl.

But she on this occasion had no sentimental recollections of her wedding-day, no remembrance that it was not a year gone by. Her mind was filled with memories, not of her wedding but of the grave—with memories of every sharp word she had spoken to her husband, of every unkind thought, and of that infidelity into which she had so shamefully fallen. Remorse is the companion that stands by Mrs. Bellingham, remorse and shame; remorse so bitter that to escape it she would gladly have lain down alive in her husband's grave;

shame so intense that she dares hardly pray to heaven for the soul's peace of the husband she believes that she has wronged. She had of late partly succeeded in driving that shameful recollection from her mind, but to-day she cannot banish it by prayer or meditation, for among the mourners stands he who was once, but never shall be again, so wrongfully dear to her. Shame, sorrow, and remorse overmaster her soul; she strives, indeed, to pray, but her mind is filled with nothing more lofty than compunction and a tender futile longing to have her husband back to life again.

How differently she would behave; she would be tender, loving, humble. Arthur should not again find the proud Pharisee, quick to chide, slow to forgive, hard in judging, cold in heart, that she had been to him. Before they had married he had been eager for religion and full of love for her, and that his mind had turned towards earthly things and his heart away from his home was her fault, and hers alone. No wonder he had ceased to love religion, seeing such hypocrisy in her who professed so much; no wonder that he too had been harsh when so much harshness had been shown to him. "The sin is mine; oh God! be mine too the punishment," prayed the widow as she left the grave. "The sin is yours, the sin is yours," echoed the carriage wheels as they rumbled back to Kensington. But when they reached the house which she had last entered by her husband's side, her composure left her, the cold remorse that had seemed to freeze her very heart forsook her, and the sense of her desolation drove out every other feeling. Her sorrow was no longer only for Arthur, for his misfortunes and his death, but also for herself, for the girl who was left without a friend in the world. Yes, she was sorry for the sinful, heartless creature, and in her self-pity, she burst into a passion of tears. She remembered so well the dull monotony of grief, the loneliness, the weary sameness of sad thoughts. "I cannot bear it," she sobbed, "I cannot bear it;" and fainting and exhausted she suffered herself to be put to bed.

While she was crying her heart out upstairs, Arthur's will was being read below. It was a very simple will, for Bellingham had had less to leave than one would have imagined. His savings were less than his debts, and the interest on the amount of his life policy would be little over a hundred a year. Therefore he had willed that the lease of his house and all his property should be sold and invested for his widow so long as she remained his widow; but in the event of her making a second marriage, or becoming a nun or sister of charity, every penny was to go to Mrs. Stanley, and in any case all was, after Deirdre's death, to be divided between his sister's little girls. Mr. Stanley and Mr. Butler were appointed executors and joint trustees. This seemed to Mr. Butler a most injudicious arrangement, since it was clearly to the Stanleys' advantage that the widow should break the conditions of her husband's bequest. The Stanleys, too, were dissatisfied, since it would give them much trouble and anxiety, and also because they feared they might be forced to take the girl to live with them, as it was impossible for so young and beautiful a woman to live alone.

For some weeks there seemed little chance that Deirdre would trouble her friends much longer. Her overstrained nerves gave way, and she lay so ill that there was little hope of her recovery. She herself knew nothing of her illness, but there came long dreary days of weariness and of disappointment that the battle of life, which had been so nearly over, was beginning again. Indifference to life made her recovery a slow one, but day by day she grew a little stronger, and, as it seemed to her, more hopeless and more sad. But a time came when she was well enough to be moved, and when her removal was desirable, since Bellingham's property was to be sold, and then the question again arose what was to become of her? There was an armed neutrality between the Butlers and the Stanleys on the subject, and they had put off till the last moment a discussion which they both felt must be disagreeable. At last it was Mrs. Butler who plunged boldly

into the matter when she paid one of her frequent visits to Melbury Road. Mrs. Stanley was still in command, though with two trained nurses under her.

"Deirdrè seems much better now," said Mrs. Butler, as she left the widow's room. "I suppose you will take her to the seaside? London air cannot be good for her."

"No, she needs change, but I fear I must yield her up to you at once. I have been so long away from my little ones; besides, you and Rose will be jealous if I do all the nursing."

"Oh, you wrong us," cried Mrs. Butler, not a little disconcerted by this move of the enemy; "we were saying only yesterday how thankful we were that poor Deirdrè had found such a friend."

"Still, my friendship is not like yours," said Susan, sweetly.

"Mr. Butler's generosity to her surpasses everything I ever heard of. He has been quite a father to her. I suppose he is fond of her?"

"I believe he is nearly as fond of her as if he were her father, cried Mrs. Butler, who was weak and easily entrapped.

"And Rose, is not Rose jealous of her friend?"

"How little you know Rose! She *could* not be jealous of anyone, least of all anyone she loves like Deirdrè. It is wonderful how the dear child from the first treated poor Deirdrè like a sister, and insisted on making her quite an equal in every way." Mrs. Butler was always eager in the praise of Rose.

"So Rose is really fond of her?"

"We all are."

"Then I suppose there must be some good in the girl," cried Mrs. Stanley, who had now gained the day; "but, oddly enough, neither Fred nor I could ever endure her."

Mrs. Butler grasped the situation in a moment, but even yet she was not prepared to give all up for lost. "Oh, you will soon see how sweet she is when you are settled down together. I only——"

"But, my dear Mrs. Butler, I thought she was to live with you, who love her and whom she loves——"

"I was just going to say how I wish that were possible, but we are really so crowded——"

"Ah, I can fancy that. London houses are so small, we ourselves are so short of room, that we have *no* spare room, absolutely *no* spare room."

"That is just our case. When Jim comes home for the holidays I really don't know where I shall put him."

"You will have to have a daily governess, as I do, and give Deirdre her old room. It will seem quite like old times to her."

"That is just one of the reasons why I believe she would be happier with you, dear Mrs. Stanley. Think how painful such a remembrance of happier days would be to her."

"Yes, indeed, I quite dread going into the poor girl's room; the sight of me seems to recall poor Arthur to her so painfully, for after all, nothing can be so sadly reminiscent of the past as the sight of——"——here Mrs. Stanley's voice broke——"of her husband's sister."

Mrs. Butler felt herself completely routed, and remembering that "He who fights and runs away will live to fight another day," resolved on a retreat before she should find herself consenting to receive so dispiriting a visitor as poor Deirdre would certainly be. "I should think that must be what Milton calls 'sweet sorrow' to the poor girl," said Mrs. Butler, "and must endear you to her greatly; but, dear me, how late it is! Good-bye, dear Mrs. Stanley, I must be running home."

"So soon? Well, then, good-bye. Let me see; Friday, was it not, that you said I should bring Deirdre to you?"

"I don't think I fixed a day."

"Oh, I was quite under the impression that you said Friday, and really I think she should go before the end of this week. You see the men come on Monday to take the things to Christie's——"

"I haven't told my husband——"

"No, of course not, since we have only just arranged matters; and you know, dear Mrs. Butler, I think that is as well. For since he is so fond of the girl it would have been *such* a disappointment both to him and Rose had anything occurred to spoil our arrangement. Ah, that is Deirdre's bell (Mrs. Butler heard no bell). I must claim a nurse's licence and leave you. Good-bye, dear Mrs. Butler; then Friday afternoon I shall bring her."

Mrs. Butler went away heavy of heart. She really liked Deirdre, so did they all; but we must be truly fond of a person to love her society when in deep grief, and Mrs. Butler could not but feel that Deirdre's sad face would be a damper on their cheerful household. Moreover, they were still in the full swim of the season, and it would seem heartless for them to go out with Deirdre so sorrowful at home. It would be impossible to give entertainments in that house of mourning. The pale face and mournful eyes of the widow were still fresh in Mrs. Butler's memory. The sight of so much sorrow would, she felt, depress her and make her ill.

Mrs. Stanley felt that her best course would be to tell Deirdre at once that it had been decided she should go to the Butlers, for when she had been informed of the arrangement they would not have the heart to change it, no matter what their desires might be; so she went straight to Deirdre's room. The day was fine, but chilly, and Deirdre, in her widow's dress, was seated by the fire as though it had been winter.

"You must have thought I was never coming," said Mrs. Stanley, as she entered—Deirdre smiled a sweet, wistful little smile as her sister-in-law continued—"but Mrs. Butler has only just this moment left. She was arranging, dear, for you to go to them on Friday."

"To go for what, Susan?"

"To live with them, dear; you can't go on living here."

"Much less can I go to them. Susan, I cannot go to

them——." She rose from her seat and moved towards her friend.

"If only we had a spare room!" gasped Mrs. Stanley, eager to forestall the suggestion that she imagined Mrs. Bellingham was about to make.

"What do you want a spare room for?" said Deirdrè, absently. "We never had anyone in ours. It always seemed to me the best room in the house wasted."

"It would not be wasted had I one," said Mrs. Stanley, putting her arm round the girl and drawing her towards her. "I should take my little Deirdrè to live with me——"

"Oh no!" cried the widow, with more animation than she had shown before. "No, Susan. You are good—good to wish it, but, my dear," she said, laying her hand on Mrs. Stanley's arm and looking sadly into her face, "I am no fit companion for you."

"Indeed, Deirdrè, we have been very good companions this sad time."

"You have been a very kind companion to me, Susan—as kind as if you were my real sister"—Mrs. Bellingham, you must remember, had never had a real sister—"but it has been a wretched time for you. I never thought of it at first—of your kindness. I was so wrapped up in myself and—him, that I was very ungrateful. But now, dear Susan, you must let me tell you how I feel your noble conduct."

Mrs. Stanley, thinking of the scene downstairs with Mrs. Butler, murmured, "What noble conduct?"

"Ah!" cried Deirdrè, "that is the way with you people who are good—you don't know it. Would you not think it a noble act if I told you of another woman who had put aside her own deep grief that she might help another in her trouble, of a woman who had left her home and her children that she might tend a woman who had no claim upon her—no claim at all, Susan, less than none—a woman who had disliked her and whom she rightly despised—a woman who had insulted her and had ordered her from her own

brother's house — a woman who was not fit to tie her shoes?"

"Deirdrè, hush; you must not excite yourself."

"No, I am not excited, dear. I must tell you what I feel — how I respect you, how I admire all your goodness, how grateful I am to you; how penitent, humbly penitent, for my past conduct to you. I don't know, Susan, how that quarrel arose; I can't remember."

"It is best forgotten."

"Ah, that is so like you! I have forgotten, Susan, but it must have been my fault. All I remember is that I was very angry. Oh!" she moaned, sinking into her chair and covering her face with her hands.

"What is it, dear?" cried Susan, thinking the circumstances of that disagreement had perchance recurred to Deirdrè's mind.

"It is only something I remember," said Deirdrè, wiping her eyes and trying not to sob.

"About that—that unpleasantness?"

"What unpleasantness?"

"That disagreement between you and me."

"Oh, no. It was that he — he told me to restrain my ungovernable temper, or—or it might ruin both our lives."

Mrs. Stanley stared a little. "Your ungovernable temper?"

"Ah, Susan!" The widow's arms fell by her side, her face was terribly sad. "Susan, it was not only you who had much to bear from me. He had—more than I can tell you. More than he knew, more than he could forgive. Oh! what would I not give to tell him I am sorry——"

"My dear, if he had no more than I, he had nothing to forgive."

Deirdrè went up to Mrs. Stanley and kissed her. "God bless and keep you, Susan, dear friend and comforter, and may He reward you for kindness I can never repay."

Mrs. Stanley was a little dismayed by so much gratitude.

Hitherto she had felt herself very exemplary, but now the gratitude seemed to outweigh the obligation.

Mrs. Bellingham had left the room, probably, as Mrs. Stanley guessed, because this scene had been too much for her. And Susan did not see her again for some hours, but when at length she joined her friend she held a letter in her hand. "Susan," she said calmly, and ignoring the scene of the afternoon, "I quite forgot to tell you just now when we were talking that I think the best plan would be for me to go to Bonsecours."

"But you can't be a nun."

"Of course not," said Deirdrè, reddening at the idea of so vile a creature presuming to offer herself to the Lord, "but I might go for a time as a visitor."

"I'm sure Mr. Butler won't allow it."

"I have been writing to ask his permission; that is the letter. I thought that perhaps you would be kind enough to read it. I suppose I ought to ask Mr. Stanley too?"

"I don't think it would be any use," said Mrs. Stanley, taking the letter; "I'm certain they won't allow it."

"You won't plead against me, Susan?" asked Deirdrè, wistfully.

"Certainly not, dear," replied Susan, decisively. To her this appeared a very simple and desirable solution to the difficulty.

Deirdrè's guardians both took this view of the situation.

CHAPTER XVII.

NEITHER of Deirdrè's guardians felt that it was quite in accordance with Bellingham's will to let her go to Bonsecours, but it was so difficult to know what better to do with her, and so hard to resist her sad pleading, that they allowed her to gratify her wish of spending a year in her old home. She had a feeling that once back at Bonsecours, peace and health of mind would return to her, that under the convent roof she could feel a sorrow for which she need have no shame. For happiness she did not even wish; all that she craved was a penitent heart, a mind fixed on heaven, thoughts in which Michael Hanlon should have no place. For, alas! when the first shock was over, she found herself wondering why Hanlon did not call to ask how she was, as Arthur's other men-friends had done, and the house in Melbury Road recalled memories of the man she loved as well as of her husband. To be free of it, to leave behind her temptations and her sinful thoughts, that was all she asked; to pass a brokenhearted, blameless life of penitence, humiliation, prayer, and fasting was all that she looked for in this life, and in the world to come the lowest seat in Paradise among sinners who are forgiven.

When the widow arrived at Villecourt the old place was in all its summer beauty. The convent garden was gay with flowers, and the walls were veiled with fragrant roses and sweet woodbine. Deirdrè had but to lean out of the window of her little cell to gather a nosegay, but to open the casement to have the flowers nodding at her and asking to be plucked. It seemed to her on that first evening that no one need wish for more than a fresh, clean, convent cell, with a window framed

in roses, and admitting air fragrant with garden flowers and the more distant sweetness of new-cut hay.

She stood at the window and looked out over the garden and the chapel roof to the western sky, still bright with the evening afterglow. There was a nameless air of purity and holiness about it all : the white bare room ; the garden neat to primness yet crammed with flowers, and peopled with the black figures of the nuns ; the grey stone chapel, from whence arose the sound of the organ and the choir practising. There was an evening stillness over everything, the magic hush of the first steps of night. Then the peace was broken by laughter a little loud and harsh, and by rough voices, and Deirdre leaning far out saw in the hay-meadow a group of women, whose forms looked coarse and heavy in their dark cotton gowns. They were the penitents having their evening recreation in the field. "My part is with them," moaned the girl, and then she knelt down on the floor and hid her face in her hands.

To the nuns and to the other visitors the young widow appeared a model of sanctity, so diligent was she in her religious duties, so constant were her prayers, so frequent her retreats. That summer was one long spiritual ecstasy. Her prayers had an ardour, her meditations an intensity that they seldom had before ; her penitence, her sorrow for her sins—ah ! it was terrible, how the poor creature tortured herself for her imaginary sins. But at last there came a day when heaven seemed so far off that her prayers could never reach it, when her sins ceased to give any sorrow, when prayers, and chants, and meditations wearied her soul almost past endurance. The once-loved services became interminable, and the convent not peaceful at all—only extremely, maddeningly dull. The days were wet and the garden dreary ; there was no escape from the visitors' room, save to her fireless cell, or the chapel wherein she could not pray and dare not sit with wandering thoughts. In the summer she had sat in the guestchamber only for her silent meals, but now the cold

and wet drove her there for her hours of recreation, and then she felt that she could not pass her life in a convent without being a nun. The nuns at least were silent if they had nothing to talk about, but here was a ceaseless, witless, purposeless chatter.

"What a cold Father Ambroise has. Did you observe the search he had for his handkerchief this morning? I thought he would never cease fumbling in the folds of his alb."

"Yes," cried she who in bygone days had chided Deirdre for her tumbled hair. "I never in my life saw anything so droll; and after all he had to tell the acolyte to fetch one from the sacristy."

"Bad as his cold is, it is nothing to old Madame Anna's cough. Do you not notice how that little hacking irritates the Reverend Mother? I could see, by the way she fidgetted in her stall this morning, it jarred her nerves almost beyond endurance."

"I think it is Madame Anna, and not the cough, that is irritating."

"That is true. What a woman!"

"But for that matter, nothing to Madame Josephine; it was only by one vote, you know, that she was elected."

"How everyone must regret that one vote. It was, so I hear, all through the obstinacy of the mother of the novices."

"At that time Madame Claire. What a head of pig she had."

"Preferable, to my mind, to the severity of Madame Agatha. I tremble—ugh! how I tremble—when she turns her yellow eyes on me."

"It is only that she is so ugly. I remember a very naughty speech my poor father was wont to make: 'The good God,' he used to say, 'loves ugly women.'"

"Very true! And rich ones, he might have added."

"Ah, my dear! that reminds me of another of his sayings that I could not repeat before the good ladies. I fear even to say it before Madame Bellingham."

"Oh, Madame Bellingham will not object. Will you, madame? Now tell us?"

"‘A key of gold,’ he used to say to us ‘will unlock any door, even the gate of heaven.’"

"Ha! ha! ha! But that is droll!"

"How merry you all are," cried Madame Cecilie, entering at that moment. "Tell me the joke. I dearly love a joke," and the little nun sat down on the floor by the stove. "Now, Deirdrè, my friend, quick with the joke."

"Oh, but Madame Cecilie," interposed one of the elder ladies, "now that you are here we have a remonstrance."

"I shall do better to go," cried the nun, moving as though she would rise.

"No, madame, sit down now. Don't you remember the cake you made us on the Feast of St. Jerome?"

"What, not gone and forgotten yet?"

"Gone, yes; forgotten, no," said the lady, laying her little fat hands, with determination, one on each knee. Now, Madame Cecilie, don't you remember a promise you made to us poor visitors?"

"To make you such a cake again. But I will. Wait and see."

"But every feast day, madame—that was the promise—with lots of plums. I expected it on St. Denis's day; but no. And yesterday, St. Luke's day, I said, Surely this is feast enough; and we were all woefully disappointed to have nothing but *tartines* for supper."

"Mea culpa," said the nun, laughing.

"Yes; but now restitution, madame—you must make restitution. Promise one for St. Ursula's. Hein! what is Madame Bellingham reading? Madame Cecilie, is it not wicked to bring newspapers here? I am always reproaching Madame Bellingham."

"Poor Madame Bellingham," cried Madame Cecilie, rising, "how I pity her! Ah, what a pretty toilette, Deirdrè! Let me see. Do you receive that paper every week?"

That was a fair average specimen of the visitors' room conversation. No one went outside the walls, no one received a newspaper; the outer world was as another sphere. Five or six ladies, hitherto unacquainted, with few ideas or interests in common, must, under such circumstances, be at a loss for conversation; and so it happened that much of the talk was mere tattle and gossiping.

Deirdrè sickened of it; she rarely saw the nuns, and the convent for which she had pined seemed to her little better than a gaol. How she craved for a change! The sameness of the days—that stupid people say makes them fly—made them interminable. She could hardly believe that those were months, and not years, that she lived in the visitors' room. Her married life was like a painful dream, or something that had happened in another world. Her sins, too, were such an old, old story that she was unable to lament them any more. She tried fresh books of devotion, new meditations, but her mind still wandered hopelessly from her prayers. “‘Consider, oh devout soul, and contemplate!’ The morning post must be in by this. I should not be surprised if there is a letter from Rose; very often she writes on Sunday; and—let me see—yes, Tuesday.”

Mrs. Bellingham, on her knees in the chapel, is an edifying spectacle to the other visitors. They do not know when she makes another stupendous effort to bring her thoughts back to her meditation. Then she tries a litany—no better. Poor weak, young, erring soul! If prayers without thoughts never mount up to heaven, hers were often most useless prayers. Like the widow of old, she cast but a farthing into the treasury; but, poor soul, that farthing was all that she had. The halting, wandering prayers were the best she could pray; she strove hard to keep her mind to them, and on this particular morning resolved that, as a penance for so much inattention, she would not leave the chapel till eleven. But so long and so many were the distractions of her mind that when the clock struck she could not honestly tell herself that she had

finished her meditation; and by the time that duty had been conscientiously performed it wanted only a quarter of an hour till Sext—just time to read a letter. But certainly there would be no letter; she would not hurry along the cloisters—she would not even expect one. Nevertheless, when she reached the guest-parlour her eyes turned towards the table, and there a letter lay. It was from Rose. How glad she was to see the writing! She could have kissed the envelope, it looked so friendly and like home. She tore it open and began to read. Yes, there were the initials M. H. She put her hand over the place, and with thumping heart read straight on—

“DEAREST DEIRDRE,—Won’t you be surprised at hearing from me again so soon, especially at this season of the year, when Bonsecours must be gay compared with London! Still, thanks to the everlasting rain, people are coming back to town, and Mrs. Dean’s afternoon, which I thought it so absurd of her to give, was rather jolly. Of course no one of exactly the *haut ton* was there, though for that matter they wouldn’t go to Mrs. Dean’s at any time of year, would they? But it’s a relief to see *anyone* after spending six weeks at Parmouth, and there really *were* nice people there. Your friend M. H. among them, looking awfully ill. He has just come back, you know, from the Tyrol, where he has been spending the autumn writing holiday letters for the *Star*. I asked him if he hadn’t a high old time, but it seems he was ill nearly all the while with malaria, or small-pox, or some fever or other, which of course I ought to have heard. By the way, I quite meant to have sent you those letters (everyone says they are most awfully good), but somehow I forgot. Now, wasn’t that just like me? However, I daresay you would not have cared much about them, because you know you don’t ‘chum on’ to descriptions of scenery and that sort of thing, do you? Now here is Jones come to say that Alex is in the drawing-room. What a bore! I have such heaps

to tell you, but I suppose I must 'dry up,' as the boys say, and believe me, dearest Deirdrè, ever your most loving

“Rose.

“P.S.—*Now* I have forgotten to tell you that M. H. asked after you *most affectionately*, and sent you his 'best regards.' I need hardly mention that most of his conversation with *me* related to you. Pleasant and flattering to me! No?”

Deirdrè read the letter again, and then the bell rang for Sext. She could not put the letter from her mind, though it depressed her and made her unhappy. It was not that Mr. Hanlon was looking ill; it was not her affair how he looked, and of course she did not care whether he had malaria or small-pox. No doubt he had suffered terribly with no one there to nurse him; or perhaps he had found some lovely mountain maid to care for him; anyhow, it was not his illness that depressed her; certainly not. It was because she was angry with Rose for writing in that strain. She felt that she could never care for her friend as she had done before. She would be ashamed for any one to see that letter. It was the kind of thing she always hated—joking about lovers; but that Rose should dare to write in that way to a woman in the first year of her widowhood said little for Miss Butler's delicacy, less for the dignity of the widow to whom she dared so write. Yet Rose's scribble about Mrs. Dean's party, and the nice people who were not quite the *haut ton*, and M. H. looking pale, and Alex waiting upstairs in the drawing-room, made the visitors' room seem even duller than before.

The convent life Deirdrè was now living was quite other to that she had passed at school. Her own sad heart would have made it so, but apart from that it was really another life. In the old days her life was full. She had her lessons, her school friends, and the dear, dear nuns always at her side. But the convent boarding-house was quite another matter. Certainly old Madame Justine sat in the window, and when one shouted very loud one might some-

times make her hear, more seldom one might even make her understand; but beyond the presence of the dear old lady there was little of the convent in that room. There was the dullness and the monotony I grant you—the early dinners, the silent meals. But the peace and holiness, the self-denial and devotion, were, I fear me, wanting.

Mrs. Bellingham had, as we know, abandoned all thought of taking vows. Many women—good women and true—take a heavenly Bridegroom because they cannot have the earthly one they love. That was not Deirdre's way. Gladly she would have given her heart to the Lord when it was pure and whole, but with the heart she now possessed—broken, besmirched, sin-spattered—she would be only the least of His servants. Still, when she went to Bonsecours she had intended staying there for good; she had meant to live the convent life, the life of prayer, and loneliness, and fasting—to take the thorns and leave the rose; but now she felt she could not do it; it was too hard for her. Do not be harsh with her; she was young, life seems so long at twenty, that Deirdre felt she could not live year after year in that dull, changeless way. She was not unhappy, at least not more unhappy than she felt she must be anywhere, only she was lonely and ill! Yes, she was very ill, so weak that it seemed a long, long walk from the chapel to her cell, that the hours of kneeling made her faint and her head ache so that she could scarcely creep back from the chapel to her room. She could not sleep, and the long nights that were not solitary because remorse and sorrow sat by her bed and kept her company, those nights were each as long as a week of placid contentment, as a month of happiness. She suffered no acute bodily pain, but she was never free from a dull aching in her head and back and limbs.

She was tired, too, so terribly tired, so weary, that all her old dread of corruption and the grave passed away, and she looked with longing towards the day when her limbs should lie out straight and stiff, and there would be no more awak-

ing, or irksome dressing, or weary dragging about of heavy, unwilling limbs. She hoped that when she was dead she would be allowed a little rest, a time of unconsciousness, before her weary soul went to the pains of purgatory or even the joys of paradise. Who does not know the feeling, the weariness of weakness and ill-health?

Deirdrè did not know it was illness that made her feel thus; she did not know that she should have been nursed up and waited on, that she ought to have rested and sat in easy-chairs, and risen late, and lain down in the afternoon. She thought it all a temptation of her sinful flesh, so she rose for Prime and stayed up for Lauds to mortify her sloth, and her offending limbs and back she punished with a stern rigour which she had never shown to any other miscreant.

No wonder that not only sorrow but sheer physical depression made her sad, or discontented, as she called it. She grew to have a sort of hatred for Bonsecours—a resentment towards it because she had once been happy there and was now miserable. Reason told her that the change was in herself—in her own altered and degraded soul; none the less she resented the cloisters and the gardens, where at every turn she met the pure-minded happy girl that had once been herself. She felt a wistful longing towards this youthful vision, and a tenderness towards its sins, its follies, and its weaknesses—its blind unconsciousness of what the future held in store for it; and she would wonder sadly if ever a day would come so black, so terrible, that she would look back with longing and with envy on the dull present as she did now on the eventless past.

Rose's letter made her feel yet more sad. She must get out; weak as she felt, she must go for a walk. There was no air in that high-walled garden, no escape within those gates from the past and from herself. She had been in the convent for five months, and had not crossed the threshold once. She might as well be in gaol; yes, the high walls, the strict rules, made the convent very like a gaol. For the first

time in her life she found herself wondering how any one who might have love and freedom could choose such a life. How insupportable it was! She tried to give her mind to her embroidery—a table-cover she was working for Mrs. Stanley—but her eyes ached to see the edge of the sky meeting the earth, to see once more the distance shaded with mist, the long expanse of road stretching out, out, out, till it kissed the sky, and she broke the unwritten law by which she bound herself to remain within the walls for a year. She must go out, she must see the fields; it would not be wet and wintry outside as it was here; she must go out. She must see something that was not neat and prim and orderly, hedged in and bounded by a wall—something that was not written over with memories.

She rose and left the room and sought old Madame Celestine to ask for permission to go for a walk. Perhaps they would not let her go alone; perhaps they would not let her go at all, for they must know that she had bound herself never to go outside the walls. She still held her embroidery in her hand, as pale and heavy-eyed she came upon the good nun.

"Madame," she said, "may I go for a walk? I am rather suffering."

"Do, my child, go now," cried the nun; "go now, and don't think of coffee-time. If you are late they shall put some by for you. How pale you are, my child! Does anything ail you? No? It is, then, that you need more exercise and change."

"If I were good like you, madame, I should need no change; it is from myself that I wish to escape."

The widow spoke with dejection, in the dispirited tone of one who is tired out.

"And I, my child, do you think I never wish to fly from myself?" said Madame Celestine, gently. "Ah, Dierdrè, for us all it is a battle to the end!"

"And you are not tired!" cried the girl, looking lovingly

at the good old face. "I am beaten, and I am only twenty," she continued, seating herself at the nun's side. "Madame, I wonder do you ever feel like this: faint-hearted and weary, and as though heaven were too far off to care what one does. I am so tired of fighting and of being always beaten. I can't do any more; it is finished. I can't even wish to be good." Her arms fell at her side, and in her pale face was a drawn, weary look.

"I feel like that sometimes even now," said Madame Celestine, smiling and taking her spectacles from her clear old eyes, "but not so often as I did at twenty. At seventy, my child, though the battle still goes on, many enemies are slain and the heat of the day is over. But I shall not talk to you now, my dear; go while it is still fine, get your walk. One must not neglect the health too much."

After all, it was not much like gaol, the nuns were all so good, so willing to help one, so motherly. Deirdre felt better before she started on her walk. But the day was depressing; the air was raw and chilly, and at every minute the gusty wind brought down a shower of withered leaves. The roads were heavy, and from the damp earth rose a thin mist laden with the odour of decaying leaves. Overhead hung a leaden cloud so charged with moisture that from time to time it fell like a ragged curtain, and enveloped everything in fog.

Deirdre's heart was heavy and joyless as the November day. She had no sense of being alone, so present were her troubles. From the first sorrows she had ever known, all her griefs recurred to her mind. Just as now had she tramped along the roads at Ballymoneyboy, while the cottiers' children hooted the bailiff's daughter. That day had been such a one as this—clearing at sunset—when she had touched her dead father's hand. The first freshness of all her sorrows seemed to return to her, of that fearful Irish tour, of that wild walk up the Edgware Road. The dreariness of her loveless marriage, the gloom of her widowhood, oppressed her to an extent that terrified her.

Ghosts of past sorrows crowded round her till the misty air was peopled with visions of woe. Yet from the future she hoped nothing. Young as she was, she did not look for coming happiness. Sad and terrible as was her joyless past, she would, had she had her choice, have lived it through again rather than meet the unknown future. "How merciful it is," she said to herself, "that we cannot see our future. Could I but realise the dreariness in store for me I could not bear it." These were her thoughts as she rang the convent bell, so that her walk had been of small use to her.

But when the weather changed and the sun shone, Deirdre found life more bearable. In her dismal mood she had not the courage to answer Rose's frivolous letter, but now she found a pleasure in writing to her friend; moreover, it was necessary to undeceive Rose on the subject of Mr. Hanlon. Mrs. Bellingham wondered how ever the girl had run away with so groundless an idea as that he had any particular friendship for her. That the interest was the other way Miss Butler could not suspect; of that, at least, Deirdre was sure, for had she had any notion of that kind she would never have been so indelicate as to mention Mr. Hanlon to her. She would write such a letter as would show not only that she was indifferent to Mr. Hanlon, but also that she was aware of his indifference towards herself. To this end she wrote,—

"DEAREST ROSE,—I should not write yet, but that I hope to hear from you in response, for there is nothing at all to write about. One day here is just like another, except when I get a letter from you. It is a great pleasure to me to have news of you all and of my other friends. I was surprised to hear that Mr. Hanlon had asked after me, for he alone of my acquaintance did not call on me before I left London, so I cannot care much for his inquiries or think him a very sincere friend. But tell me, dear, about every one else. Do you know that when you last wrote you

never mentioned Kate and Emily, or Jim, or even your parents? Give my love to all of them, and tell the children to spend some wet half-holiday in writing to their old governess; and, dear Rose, believe me your loving

“DEIRDRE.”

“She can't think, after this, that Mr. Hanlon interests me,” said Deirdre to herself as she folded the letter. “At any rate it will free her mind from that delusion.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

WE, who know Miss Butler's heart and feelings, are aware that she felt rather too deep an interest in Hanlon, and that she thought him quite the nicest person she had ever met. But though there is little doubt that had he asked her to marry him she would have thrown over poor Alex Campbell, and have regretted it ever after, her love for the young novelist was a well controlled sentiment, by no means strong enough to embitter her whole existence.

Sometimes, indeed, when things generally had gone wrong, and she was at a loss for something to cry over, she did shed tears over the hard fate that kept her from Hanlon, and tried to think that death were preferable with Michael to perpetual life without him; but on the whole she succeeded in being a fairly happy young woman. She was quite shrewd enough to see that Hanlon loved Deirdrè, quite honest enough to respect the motives which had induced him to avoid Mrs. Bellingham during her husband's lifetime, but she was by no means sure whether her friend was aware of his attachment, and returned his feeling.

Deirdrè's note satisfied her mind on both points. "Well," she said to herself, after reading it, "that was *rather* overdoing his indifference; even Deirdrè might have suspected something from that. However, it's quite clear that *she* cares for him, for I'm sure she doesn't know whether anyone else left cards on her or not. Ah, ha! Miss Deirdrè, you've told me a good deal *this* time, and all the while you're flattering yourself upon your duplicity and talent for subterfuge."

Rose certainly was flattering herself upon her clear-sighted-

ness. She thought these unsophisticated young people very amusing; it was quite ludicrous how easily they deceived themselves and each other, and by what thin deceptions they expected other people to be taken in.

And yet, in Miss Rose's own heart, there was a little corner that she had left unexplored. She was deluding herself and cheating herself just in the same way as those other young people, whose devices seemed so transparent to her; for without acknowledging it to herself, almost without suspecting it, Rose was a little insincere in her *role* of matchmaker. She did wish to bring Michael and Deirdrè together and to stimulate their interest in each other; but she had heard—as who has not—of ladies who, in consoling lovers for their absent mistresses, have usurped the lover's heart. And though, of course, Deirdrè was very lovely, she was strangely deficient in sparkle, wit, and the occult art of pleasing. Rose's gay blue eyes had made many more conquests than Deirdrè's grave hazel ones; so if, while she was doing her best to attract Hanlon to Deirdrè he were to be so silly, so very silly, as to come to prefer herself, it would not be such a very unheard-of thing after all. Had you told Rose that she cherished this disingenuous idea never so faintly, she would have been horrified, for the unbidden thought lurked quietly in that dark region of her heart which she preferred to ignore.

For some weeks she had no chance of playing the part of destiny, but at length she met Hanlon. It was at the private view of the Grosvenor Gallery. There was a dense crowd, and both Rose and the young man knew every second person, so it was not precisely the place and time one would choose to make a confidence. But Rose's chances were too few for her to lose even a bad one. Hanlon was half a room off when she saw him, but by dint of much pushing and squeezing, much cutting of her friends, Miss Butler succeeded in reaching him. "You here, Mr. Hanlon!" she cried, in a voice of pleased surprise.

Hanlon smiled his brilliant smile and shook hands in his usual effusive manner. "Well, Miss Butler, this is pleasant. How are you?"

"Oh, I'm always well, don't you know. That looks a nice picture, doesn't it? Who is it by? Doesn't the girl remind you of Mrs. Bellingham?"

Hanlon could not think the round-faced, rosy little maiden, nursing a kitten very reminiscent of Deirdrè. It did not, he said, much recall Mrs. Bellingham to him. By the way, had Miss Butler heard lately from her friend, and was she well?

"Oh, quite well," cried Rose. "At least," she added, looking with unutterable tenderness at Michael, "not *quite*, I should think, judging, don't you know, from the tone of her last letter. She seemed, I thought, not, perhaps, unhappy, but, you know, bored—though one ought not say bored of a convent. I'm sure I should *never* be bored if only *I* were in a convent." Here Miss Rose heaved the longest and deepest of sighs.

"Is that so? Well, now, I would have thought a convent would have bored you very quickly, Miss Butler."

Rose shook her head and sighed again. Hanlon wondered what on earth was the matter. "So you think that—er—Mrs. Bellingham is depressed?" It was curious how little interest his voice expressed when he spoke of Mrs. Bellingham.

"Don't *tell* her I said so," said Rose, meaning to imply that she thought Hanlon corresponded with her friend—a subtlety quite wasted upon Michael. "Oh, by the way, I gave her your message."

"What message?" asked Hanlon, sharply. He imagined Rose had invented the message.

"I shall tell her you have forgotten. Not that she will be surprised, for she said, don't you know, that she doesn't think you very sincere." Hanlon was speechless with bewilderment, so Rose continued, "I haven't had a chance of forget-

ting. You *must* remember sending her your kind regards. Well, do you know, she wrote back such an offended sort of letter, because, don't you know—shall I tell you?"

"I would like to understand."

"Well, you know, when poor Arthur died you never wrote, or called, or anything, and she thought it most awfully unkind; at least not unkind, but—well, rather forgetful, don't you know."

"It was from the fear of intruding that I kept away," said Hanlon, looking distressed, "certainly not from forgetfulness nor for any want of sympathy." There was a distinctly aggrieved tone in his voice and a certain coldness of manner.

"I'll tell her what you say; I'm sure she will be pleased—if she believes it," added Rose, with one of her most killing glances; "but I fancy that she thinks you *rather* fickle, to drop her and poor Arthur in that sudden way, though of course I know people *do* find Deirdrè a little dull and——"

"She is the last person I should call dull."

"Then it was fickle. Oh, it's no use shaking your head in that way, like Deirdrè, for it was very, *very* fickle," and Rose shot another arrow from her eyes.

"It was not my doing at all, Miss Butler," said Hanlon, gravely. "It would not be fair of me to say that Mrs. Bellingham hinted that I was not welcome; but it seemed to me she implied it. I may have done something to offend her, or perhaps I abused the welcome I had in the summer. Anyhow, both she and Bellingham changed towards me, you understand."

"I'm sure there's some mistake, for I know she was quite hurt by your dropping them, and so was poor Arthur, though I remember now, Deirdrè *did* say she thought you and Arthur were tired of each other; but I know *she* was most awfully hurt."

"Indeed, Miss Butler, I trust not. I would be grieved to think I had behaved ill to poor Bellingham; and I respect his wife more than any woman I know."

"Then you must be glad to feel that she likes you enough

to care *what* you do." And with this parting shot, fired with a laugh and a very speaking glance, Miss Butler tripped away, leaving poor Hanlon mystified and humiliated, with the consoling knowledge that Deirdrè thought him insincere, fickle, and a fair-weather friend.

A summary, or rather a very garbled version, of this conversation was sent by Rose to Bonsecours. What effect, she wondered, would it have on Deirdrè? She waited eagerly for an answer, but when it came Hanlon was not even alluded to. How to interpret this silence she did not know. She thought over it a good deal, and then concluded, as she had thought at first, that it was very mysterious.

Very mysterious, too, Hanlon thought Miss Butler's conduct at the Grosvenor; nor was Deirdrè less bewildered by the letter she received from the young lady, and so far neither of the lovers were the happier for their friend's interference. Before Rose had taken up their case the matter had been very simple. Hanlon had seen in Deirdrè's manner a dislike to himself, born of the intuition by which women divine when men are in love with them. His own heroines always possessed this intuition in a remarkable degree; they were subtle personages, gifted, at the age of eighteen, not only with insight into character, but with a knowledge of the world that would have been masterly at fifty. Such an obtuse person as poor Mrs. Bellingham his mind never imagined. But Mrs. Bellingham was so simple as to believe that if a man avoided her it was because he disliked her, and nothing short of a declaration would have made her suspect any man of being in love with her. Certainly dislike had not been the cause of her avoidance of Hanlon, but it seemed so probable that he should dislike her, and the idea that he was in love with her never entered her mind. All she feared was that he was not merely tired of her society, but that he disliked her because he guessed her feeling towards himself. That feeling she believed to be dead, and all her wish respecting Hanlon was that she might never again see the man in whose

sight she was so disgraced. The very thought of him overwhelmed her with shame. He had suspected her secret, and taken no pains to hide his contempt; he had not even pitied her or made an outward show of sympathy with her when Arthur died. Since then she quite disliked him; it was dislike and shame that made her heart thump so at the sight of his name, at the thought of him; and yet she would have given all she had for his esteem—to be held by him as he held Rose and other women.

But Rose's letter unsettled all this theory. M. H. appeared in that account as a being so broken-hearted that he could hardly control his emotions; and though Deirdre knew Rose too well to believe a tithe of this, she could not help wondering how much of it was true.

"I met M. H. at the private view of the Grosvenor. Of course he talked of *you* all the time, so I asked him why he had not called on you before you left London. He looked *so* miserable and went so white that I really felt sorry I had done so; but, my dear girl, what *do* you suppose he said? Why, that you had, more or less, ordered him out of your house. There were quite tears in his eyes as he told me, and I am sure he is *most awfully* cut up. I told him that I really didn't think you meant it, for that you are offended with him for not having written or called. He really seemed broken-hearted, for he says he respects you more than almost any woman he knows. I felt inclined to tell him the tale of the man who asked the girl to marry him because 'I love your father and mother and respect you,' but I thought that might be going rather *too* far, and even *I* must draw the line somewhere, must not I?" And a few days later the recluse heard that "M. H. was at the Academy, my dear girl. Fond as I am of you, I do wish he would *sometimes* talk of something else—just for a change, don't you know. He made quite a rush at me. 'How is Mrs. Bellingham?' he began at once. It really is a *little* trying to be treated so patently as Mrs. Bellingham's friend. Still, for your sake,

my dear, I will (or, as M. H. would say, shall) endure even this."

Deirdrè did not know what to make of these effusions, which seemed to her singularly unfitted to the circumstances. Rose must be well aware how greatly her friend disliked that kind of joking, which, at the best of times, was, to Deirdrè's mind, utterly witless and in extremely bad taste. She would have remonstrated, but she had learned long since that remonstrances were wasted on Miss Rose; so as she was too fond of the girl to wish to quarrel with her, she thought the best thing she could do was to ignore the matter, and trust that Rose would soon tire of her one-sided joke.

But to Miss Butler it was no joke at all. Her purposeless, frivolous little life was sometimes rather uninteresting, and at these dull times she would create some intrigue or affair to give piquancy to her days. She had striven to make matches for various of her friends, even including Alex Campbell; and now she threw herself heart and soul into the match she was resolved to bring about between Hanlon and Mrs. Bellingham, so her letters continued to be chiefly on the subject of "M. H." These letters did not give a very exact account of what took place between Rose and the young man; for in reality it was she who invariably opened the subject, whereas in the correspondence it was always Hanlon who began it.

The idea of being talked over was unpleasant to Mrs. Bellingham. "I think it impertinent of Mr. Hanlon," she wrote to Rose, "to discuss me even to you, though no doubt he does it with the intention of making himself very agreeable to you; for I am sure that any regard he professes for me is merely as your friend. I feel now quite to know everything that he is not only doing but thinking. Tell me, next time you write, something about our other friends—I have not heard from Susan Stanley"—and so on. Rose shook her pretty head over this passage. "I wish it *were* for my sake that he cares for you, madam," she said, sighing; "but it's too bad of me to have made him seem impertinent; I must

efface that impression." And after this one letter of explanation the initials "M.H." disappeared for a time from Rose's correspondence.

Deirdrè persuaded herself that she was very glad of this, and that Rose's letters were much more interesting without mention of Hanlon; yet somehow she did not read the letters over so often as she had done when they related to the person she would have disliked had she not almost forgotten him. Indeed, she seemed to have been so long at Bonsecours that her life in London was like a dream. She felt as though the real Deirdrè had lived in that chapel and that guest-parlour all her life. She could not shake off her depression and melancholy. Her mind had dwelt on her sins and with her dead husband till her capacity for joy and happiness seemed gone. She had been so ill before she came to the convent that she had come to be regarded as one white and wan as death, and there was nothing to shock the nuns in her weak health and her sad, sad face. Only the ladies who had the care of the school shook their heads when they saw the melancholy listless woman who had left them two years ago such a healthy, happy girl. To them those years had flown—two or three years made but little change in their peaceful lives—but those years had brought to Deirdrè the most terrible experiences of womanhood, and the widow seemed to the nuns, as to herself, quite another person to the innocent Deirdrè Dineen.

The spring days brought her no return of health. Her face was as wan and bloodless, her hands as white and thin, as they had been on her return to the convent; only in place of the feverish ecstasy that had then consumed her soul was a weary languor that made everything a trouble almost too heavy to endure. She had hardly the energy even to write to Rose; and as the spring advanced the correspondence flagged on both sides: on Deirdrè's because she was too weak and listless to write, on Rose's because Deirdrè was but little in her thoughts. For many weeks she did not see

Michael Hanlon, and she almost forgot the absorbing interest she had so lately taken in his affairs; but if Miss Butler's interest flagged quickly it also speedily revived, and when, one evening, she met Michael at a dance, all her affection for him returned.

"Wherever have you been all this time?" she cried. "I began to think you had disappeared from the face of the earth."

"So I have, socially," replied Hanlon, smiling.

"How flattering for our hostess! Is to be here a sign of social disappearance?"

Hanlon laughed. "Well, 'tis the rarest thing in the world for me to go out now; for, Miss Butler, I have been so fortunate as to get an appointment on a daily paper, and I am at the office for five nights of the week."

"So that's what you call fortunate! I should think it a calamity that made life past endurance. No dances, no theatres. Oh, *why* do you do it?"

"For money, of course," replied the young man, laughing. "Certainly not for love of being kept up till four o'clock in the morning. What should you think I get for it? 'Tis splendid pay."

"I should say a million a year would be poor compensation. But what is it really?"

"Not quite a million, but it's just three times as much as ever I've been able to make before—six hundred a year."

"Is that much? I suppose, though, it *is* at your age, because very few men now earn *anything* until they're forty. And I suppose you can go on earning the—the—let me see, what is a third of six hundred? Divide three by six. Oh, whatever can it be?"

"Two hundred," suggested Michael.

"Yes, I suppose that must be it. You can still earn the two hundred all the same, can't you? So that you have nearly a thousand a year to do just as you like with. Don't I wish I had a thousand a year to do just what I liked with."

"I've never had it yet," said Hanlon, "for I've only been appointed two months, but I cannot say that at present I feel much happier;" and then he sighed and smiled wistfully.

"You always *did* seem so *very* happy that perhaps you can't be any happier than you used to be," said Miss Rose with a gentle sigh, that might be supposed to indicate a wish to give or a willingness to receive sympathy.

Hanlon took it for the first.

"'Tis no use pulling a long face or boring people with one's troubles," he said; and then feeling aggrieved, as cheerful people always do, at not being considered profoundly melancholy, he added, "but I can never remember the days when I had not plenty to look sad about."

"I am very sorry," said Rose, softly. "But I think, don't you know, that I can guess what *one* of your troubles is, and," she continued, blushing and looking very fixedly at her little white shoes, "and *if* I guess right, I'm only *rather* sorry for you, because, don't you know, I think it's a thing you might bring to an end yourself."

"Then you can't guess right," cried Hanlon with despair.

"How can I end it, Miss Butler, tell me that?"

"She won't *always* be in a convent," said Rose, demurely.

(Really it was quite shocking, the way Miss Butler and that young Hanlon were going on together. There could be no doubt that she was leading the poor young fellow on, and by their looks it was probable that she had encouraged him to make her an offer, which, of course, she would refuse, for it was quite out of the question that Miss Butler should marry a journalist.)

When Rose said, "She won't always be in a convent," the young man flushed up so suddenly that there could be no doubt whatever to any sensible mind that she had either accepted or refused him. The only doubt was which, but Hanlon, absorbed in the topic they were discussing, was unconscious of appearances.

"She doesn't care for me one bit;" and as he said this he

looked so sad that there was no doubt he was reproaching her for her cruelty.

"Well, that's a subject we can't agree on," said Rose, loudly. "I think she does," and then, leaving poor Hanlon more bewildered than ever, she went and sat on the stairs with young Dawn, laughing and talking a great deal louder than was at all *comme il faut*. (What Mrs. Butler could be thinking of to allow her daughter to go on in that way it was impossible to imagine! Surely the girl could be prevented; nay, even if force were required, she should be prevented from being so fast, so shockingly fast!)

Even Campbell, dearly as he loved the little girl, was angry with her this evening, for who could imagine that Miss Butler feels much more like crying than laughing, and that the first thing she will do when she gets home will be to fling herself on her bed in a passion of tears, sobbing, "They will never know what I have done for them; they will never be properly grateful."

Ah, my dear Rose, you would have done better to leave Fate to spin her own thread. Could you but know it, those young people have little cause to be properly grateful.

CHAPTER XIX.

As the spring advanced, Mr. Butler and Mr. Stanley began seriously to consider what they had better do for their ward when her year at Villecourt should be over.

Now that her affairs were settled, Deirdrè was found to be the possessor of between four and five hundred a year, and therefore, so far as money was concerned, was perfectly independent. But in another sense a homeless woman of twenty cannot be called independent. The Stanleys did not think it would be a bad thing to offer her a second year at Villecourt; but Butler, whose conscience had often pricked him for allowing her the one, would not hear of it, and the old discussion began as to where she should live. Deirdrè herself proposed that she should live in the town of Villecourt, either in a family or with a chaperon; but though it was not convenient to the Butlers to receive her in their house, they wished to have her near them, and would not sanction a foreign residence, so it was finally decided—much against Deirdrè's wish—that she should, at least for a time, live in London.

There came in the spring a gentle and poor old maid to the convent, a Mademoiselle Lefevre. With this lady Deirdrè soon became intimate, and it was she whom she chose for her chaperon in London. So in June the young widow and the old maid came to the sunny lodgings Rose had taken for them in St. David's Terrace, South Kensington, and to which that young lady was so constant a visitor that the landlady offered her a latchkey.

Rose had so much to tell Deirdrè that she thought she should never finish. So much had happened to Miss Butler,

and she had so great a passion for detail, that her tale really did seem unending; and Mademoiselle Lefevre, who spoke no English, was quite tired of smiling and saying, "Ah, yas, yas," before Rose was fairly launched on her way. About three times a day Rose flew round to St. David's Terrace, and at least once daily she insisted on taking Deirdre home with her.

On the whole, those first days were very pleasant ones, and both Mrs. Bellingham and her companion were much brighter and happier than they had been in the convent. They rose early, and every morning they went to mass; then, after breakfast, they went either with their books and sewing into Kensington Gardens, or into some dark alley to visit the poor. They had dinner early, and the afternoons they passed much in the same way as the mornings. In the evening, that they might not be dull, they often had Kate and Emily to tea. You cannot imagine a quieter, more provincial life than these two women proposed for themselves in South Kensington. From time to time some old acquaintance, such as Mrs. Stanley would call on them, but their chief visitor was Miss Butler.

Rose, for her part, was very uneasy about Michael Hanlon. Deirdre would not talk of him, and all Miss Butler's efforts to sound her friend in the matter were unavailing; and yet she felt it was mean not to let the young man know that his lady was in town. Poor Hanlon! It was treason, after all the confidences he had made her, not to tell him the good news. But she met Hanlon nowhere. For three weeks this went on, and then Rose went for the race week to Ascot. Mrs. Bellingham seemed very distraught when her friend came to bid her farewell. She answered her questions at random, and showed other signs of distress. "Don't be so down-hearted, old girl," cried Rose, affectionately, "it's only for a week;" and then Deirdre aroused herself and listened intently to Miss Butler's description of the dresses she should wear at the races. Never had Miss Butler had more success

than she achieved at Ascot, never had she had more languishing swains around her. She was really quite sorry to come back to London, and she had not been home half an hour before she said she must go and tell Deirdrè her adventures. Mrs. Butler said she would probably meet Alex there, for he had said he should try to call on Mrs. Bellingham to-day. So Rose was not at all surprised to hear that there was "a gentleman in the drawing-room, please miss."

"Oh, I know—Captain Campbell," said Rose in her off-hand way, as she ran upstairs; and then she went into the room and found, not Campbell, but Michael Hanlon with Deirdrè. "Fancy *you* here," said Rose in a voice that was not all pleasure; for who that wishes to do a kindness likes to find their good offices unneeded? "I suppose you wrote to him," she said sharply to Deirdrè. "*I* didn't know where he lived."

"Campbell told me that Mrs. Bellingham was in town," said Hanlon; and then he and Deirdrè looked at one another and smiled in a peculiar manner, and it occurred to Rose that Mrs. Bellingham at least had been weeping.

"Why these becks, and nods, and wreathed smiles?" she asked. "What's the mystery? Oh, please don't tell me, if you don't want me to know." Evidently Miss Rose was somewhat out of humour.

"There is no mystery, my dear," said Mrs. Bellingham; and after a pause she added, "Mr. Hanlon has asked me to marry him."

"You've *never* refused him?" cried Rose, eagerly.

"Well," laughed Hanlon, "do you think I'd be sitting here if she had, Miss Butler?"

"Oh, I am glad!" cried Rose, throwing her arms round Deirdrè's neck; and then, by way of showing how glad she was, she began to cry.

"Poor little thing; dear Rose," said Mrs. Bellingham, kissing and pressing the weeping girl to her heart. "How good, good, good she is to feel for us so much!"

"It's walking in the sun," sobbed Rose, "and I haven't had my—my tea."

"What a shame. What was I thinking of, I wonder, not to give you some," cried Michael, pouring out some cold tea which had remained forgotten on the table for more than an hour.

Still it was tea, and as such had a magic effect on the nerves of both ladies.

"I shall make Michael have some," said Deirdrè in that tone of tender authority women assume towards the men they love. "He looks very pale, and I think he has been walking in the sun." Whereupon both Hanlon and Miss Butler went very red. "Don't you think, Rose, that he has grown extremely thin?" continued Deirdrè, looking at her lover as though he were the most wonderful creature that the world had ever seen. "The night hours are trying his health, and I am sure he is not strong." The contemplation of his pallor brought tears into her glorious eyes.

"Indeed, it is not the night hours," said Michael with his sudden smile. "I will get cheeks now like baking apples."

"They would be very unbecoming, because they would be green. Do you not know, sir, that baking apples are bright green?"

"They would be very patriotic," said Rose, laughing rather harshly; "but I must be off, and leave you young lovers to yourselves." Then Deirdrè tried to make her stay to dinner; at which invitation Rose, who knew that her friend dined early, was rather mystified. No, she could not stay. So Mrs. Bellingham said that if Rose would wait a minute, while she went to put on her bonnet, she and Michael would walk with her to her door.

"Really, Miss Butler," said Hanlon when Deirdrè had closed the door, "I don't know how to thank you for all the kindness you have shown me. Without your help I would have lost all this happiness."

Rose laughed a strident laugh that had little fun in it. "You are very good, Mr. Hanlon, but really I don't deserve your gratitude. I didn't tell you Mrs. Bellingham's address."

"No, but Campbell did; and, of course, you told him."

"Oh, I thought, perhaps, that Deirdre wrote and asked you to come."

"No, indeed. That would have been very unlike her," he added, half to himself and smiling.

"Would it? Well, of course, *you* know her so much better than *I* do. But I really don't see why she shouldn't, don't you know. She didn't take long to make up her mind when she *did* see you, did she?—for, *of course*, she could not have cared for you in her husband's lifetime; that would be quite impos—"

"My dear Miss Butler," began Hanlon, offended and amazed; but just at that moment Deirdre came into the room.

"My dear girl," cried Rose, "I thought you were *never* coming. What an age you have been, and, after all, your bonnet isn't straight. I should leave off that crape veil if I were you; it seems so inappropriate, doesn't it? Never mind about putting it straight now. It must be seven. Yes, it's five minutes past. What a bore. It's a good thing I'm not as long dressing as you are, or I should be late for dinner, and as I couldn't leave anybody to entertain my people as Mr. Hanlon did me while *you* were dressing, they might find it monotonous, don't you know. By the way," she continued, as they walked downstairs, "how *very* fortunate that old Mademoiselle Lefevre should be out of the way on this particular afternoon; it would have been *such* a disappointment for both of you if she had been in."

Michael and Deirdre looked at each other and smiled. Whatever could have put Miss Butler so much out of temper? "You must not spoil my day, dear Rose, by being cross with me," said Deirdre, tenderly.

"That's just why I am cross," cried the girl, with a sudden compunction. "It's no longer in my power to spoil your

days or improve them. Put yourself in my place, Mr. Hanlon and forgive me. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

The lovers turned away, and Rose watched the tall young figures strolling up the dusty road. How happy they looked, Deirdre with her hand on Michael's arm! Anyone could see they were lovers. How happy they were! Rose sighed. Well, she wished she had made herself less disagreeable.

Miss Butler was very silent all dinner-time, and silence was with her so rare that her mother looked at her from time to time with gentle anxiety; but though the young girl knew she was attracting attention—and for a wonder she wished to avoid it—she was unable to talk of anything but her friends' love affair, and she did not know whether that might not be a secret.

She had had no idea how much she had enjoyed her self-constituted office of go-between till, when Deirdre had announced her engagement, she had felt a light go out of her life. It was enough to make anybody cross, she thought; still, she wished she had been less ill-humoured; and then she consoled herself by thinking, not without bitterness, that the lovers had been too intent on each other to notice her crossness. Her heart was very heavy and her head ached; there was a choking feeling in her throat, and she would gladly have declared herself ill and gone to bed. But, being a young woman of considerable courage, she would not own to herself that she was fretting for a man who had never even pretended to care for her. She was not sure that she had ever cared for Hanlon at all. She felt a little dull now that the excitement of his affair was over, nothing more; so she made herself look as charming as possible, and was only a trifle paler than usual when, with rather a fixed smile on her pretty little face, she entered Lady Norman's drawing-room behind her mother.

Alex was already there—the faithful Alex, as well set up a young soldier as one could see, high of collar, tight of patent-

leather shoe—far more a conquest to be proud of than poor Hanlon, who, it must be owned, was addicted to what Rose called “the literary dress.” Captain Campbell thought Rose looked more beautiful than ever; he longed to speak with her, but it was midnight before she allowed him to say so much as “Good evening,” but when she did unbend she was most unusually gracious.

“If I tell you a secret,” she began, “will you swear not to tell any one?”

“What is it?”

“Oh, you must swear first. It is a *very* great secret, and a most awfully interesting piece of news. No, I think, after all, that perhaps I'd better *not* tell you, in case, don't you know, anyone should ever ask me if I *had* told. You needn't look so despairing, Alex, I'll give you a hint, and then, you know, I sha'n't have told, and you can guess for yourself. Now, *how* can I let you know without telling you? Let me see.” Miss Butler looked serious, and rested her chin on her hand. “Now I know how to do it. Just like the society papers, letting you know everything without saying it, so that it's not a libel. But you must swear never to so much as hint to *anyone* who told you, and when the people tell you you must be most awfully surprised.”

“So it's a marriage?”

Rose nodded. “How did you guess that? Clever Alex!”

“Oh, I say, don't keep me in suspense!” The poor fellow was really alarmed, for Rose was such a strange girl that she might be about to announce her own engagement.

“Won't you be surprised when you hear who it is!”

“Oh, go on!” cried Campbell in agony.

Rose folded her hands on her knee and put on a demure expression, looking straight before her. “We hear that a marriage is arranged— Doesn't that sound like *Truth*?”

“Never mind *Truth*.”

“Alex, for shame! Never mind truth! How can you be so

immoral! But that's very good for a society paper, because, don't you know, they never *do* mind truth."

Campbell groaned. "Are you never coming to the point?"

"The suspense is to work you up to the proper degree of interest and astonishment. Now, I'll begin again, only mind you don't interrupt me this time or I sha'n't tell you at all: We hear that a marriage is arranged between Mrs. B., the young and lovely widow of——"

"Never!" cried the Captain; "not already?"

"Yes, already. It *is* rather soon, isn't it?"

"Rather! I should think so. Who's the man?"

"Can't you guess? I guessed long ago, but I mustn't *tell* you; I must only give another hint——"

"The other was a good broad hint."

"So will this be. What's the use of a hint if one can't take it; and you know, Alex, you can never catch any but the broadest hint. Let me see, how far did I get? Oh, between Mrs. B., the young and lovely widow of a late lamented A.R.A., and the rising author and journalist——"

"Hanlon?"

"I name no names."

"But it is Hanlon?"

"You should have let me finish, *then* you would have heard the initials, and even *you*, Alex, couldn't puzzle long as to *which* M. H. among all the historians and novelists of your acquaintance it could be."

"Then it is Hanlon. However did you suspect it? Upon my soul! to think of that girl being married again already."

"O heavens! die two months ago and not forgotten yet? Then there's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year."

"But Bellingham wasn't a great man, was he?" asked the practical Captain, quite unconscious that Rose was making a quotation.

"And yet his wife has mourned for him a whole year!"

"Good heavens, yes! Why, it is two years and a half since you told me that she was going to be married to Bellingham. I remember, Rose, that I hoped then that before her wedding-day you would be my wife, and now she is to—*to make Hanlon happy, and here am I still in suspense.*"

Rose was hanging her head and playing shyly with her fan; it was she now who was confused, and though the Captain's eloquence was somewhat halting she made no attempt to rally him.

"You must know, Rose, how I adore you," he continued. "You must see that you have always been the one woman in the world for me. You won't say no, this time, Rose—Rose!"

Miss Butler made no answer.

"Oh, Rose, don't let—don't let—" The Captain's oratory failed him.

"Don't let her make a *third* man happy," suggested Rose, demurely.

"Oh, you are heartless!" cried Campbell, really hurt. "How can you be so cruel? The love of a life, if you can't return it, is entitled to your respect." Even at the moment Campbell felt proud of that phrase. "How can you speak so, Rose, when you know you make me miserable?"

"I don't want to make you miserable, Alex."

"Then, Rose, say you will be my wife. I know I'm not rich, or clever, or in any way worthy of you; but, dear, if love can satisfy you—you——"

"Shall have nothing to complain of?"

"Ah, Rose, I'm in no laughing mood; do for once be serious."

"I am quite serious."

"Then, dearest Rose, will you be my wife?"

Again no answer.

"Say yes, Rose."

"Yes," said Rose, very softly.

"God bless you, dear, for that," said the Captain, gravely.

As for Rose, she was strangely silent, and her pretty face wore a pensive look that well became its suave rounded lines. Campbell found that sweet serious mood as enchanting as it was rare; he would have loved it less had he been able to follow his lady's thoughts.

CHAPTER XX.

A DISCREET silence has been maintained respecting that *tête-à-tête* between Hanlon and Mrs. Bellingham. Not, forsooth, that anything is sacred to their allseeing biographer, but simply because Mr. Hanlon's eloquence was not what one might expect of so fluent a personage on a great occasion. From Mrs. Bellingham's answer we may conclude that he acquitted himself to her satisfaction, though, in truth, he fell far short of the received standard of romance. He did not fall upon his knees, he did not even lay his hand upon his heart. He said nothing about hers being the first lips that he had ever pressed. He did not even rise to Captain Campbell's height about the one woman in the world and the love of a life. From all these flowers of eloquence he was restrained by an embarrassment unusual to him, by the timidity natural to a man when he asks the love of a woman whom he feels to be his superior, by the fact that he had long ago confided his affairs with Kitty to Mrs. Bellingham, and also by a love of truth not usually attributed to men of his nationality. Of course Hanlon, like every other honest young man who is in love, felt that his past passions were as naught to the one which now consumed him, and I daresay he told Mrs. Bellingham all that, and that she believed it. But when he remembered that before Kitty Dolan had lit a fire in his heart he had described that organ to his brother as an extinct volcano; when he remembered the impassioned verses he had penned to Mademoiselle Snookini, who was fifteen years his senior, he could not tell Mrs. Bellingham that she was the one love in a life; nor, when he recalled certain passages between

himself and the mature charmer who had extinguished the volcano, could he tell Deirdrè that hers were the first lips his had ever pressed. Do not misunderstand; there was nothing shameful in poor Michael's past. He had at nineteen wished passionately to marry the Snookini; only this was not the first eruption of his volcano.

So, you see, Hanlon's was a very tame proposal, not in any way worth recording, while I take the offer of a young Guardsman who can express himself as the Captain did to be of quite an exceptional nature. For how many officers do we know who at thirty can assure a lady—especially a lady they never saw till they were turned three-and-twenty—that she is the one love of their life, and that she has always been the only woman in the world for them? I fear me that we shall all fall back on Captain Campbell, and that our list will end where it has begun. As for Deirdrè, she had known all about Kate Dolan long ago. I cannot be sure that Michael had not laughed to her about the Snookini, when, one night, he went with the Bellinghams to hear *Don Giovanni*, and the Snookini acted Elvira, looking very old and fat for the part. Anyhow, Mrs. Bellingham knew she was not her Michael's first and only love, and derived from this knowledge much satisfaction. She had no opinion of a man's first love—none at all. But women are not like men. She had never loved any man until she saw her Michael, and she knew she should never, never, love any other; but with a man it is different. She did not confide this to her lover, being as yet a little shy and strange with him.

That chat which Miss Butler interrupted was not the first interview that our young people had had. Indeed, Hanlon had but just left Mrs. Bellingham's drawing-room on that day—a week gone by—when Rose came to bid her friend farewell before going to Ascot. So that the sorrow Deirdrè felt at parting for a whole week from Rose was not, as that young lady imagined, the sole cause of her distracted answers and dreamy eyes. She had been very shy and blushing through-

out that first interview—a little freezing, Hanlon thought, till just as he was going away she stammered something about hoping to see him again some day, and the young man observed that he would be passing the door to-morrow afternoon. Then Mrs. Bellingham hoped he would come in, and Hanlon's business had caused him to pass the door every afternoon about tea-time. At that hour she was always seated at the window, busy at her embroidery frame. As he went by Hanlon invariably gave one of those casual involuntary glances one mechanically casts at a friend's window, and started surprised that Mrs. Bellingham should happen to be there, stopped short, raised his hat, walked on three steps very fast, then turned again, and saw Mrs. Bellingham's ear and cheek, crossed the road, and came up, just for a moment, to mention something he had omitted to say yesterday afternoon. Then he would greet Mademoiselle Lefevre with great effusion, and Mrs. Bellingham with much embarrassment, and talk in his best school French to the elder lady, while the younger, with trembling hands, poured out the tea, her heart meanwhile beating so loudly that Michael could not have failed to hear it had not his own volcano been thumping away to an extent that was deafening.

The same little scene took place every afternoon—the accidental passing, the casual glance, the surprise that Mrs. Bellingham should be at the window, the hurried visit for a moment that lasted about two hours and a half, and sent Mr. Michael eastward too late for there to be any chance of dinner for him before he went to the office.

After three of these interviews Mademoiselle Lefevre took to forgetting her scissors, and her thimble, and her needles, and her handkerchief, and having to go for these articles to her bedroom. The confusion of the young people was increased by her absence; they talked wide of the mark, stammered, spoke in voices unlike their own, and if their eyes met they blushed very red, and looked suddenly down. Yet, in some incomprehensible way, each became aware that his

or her love was returned, and that proposal of Michael's seemed quite the natural outcome of these shy and silent interviews.

"I am afraid, Michael," said Mrs. Bellingham, when they had left Rose upon her doorstep, "I am afraid Rose did not enjoy herself at Ascot. She seemed to me a little—depressed this afternoon."

"Is that what you call a little depressed?" asked Hanlon, with a look of reverential and yet protecting love. "I would have said she was uncommonly cross."

"Oh, no! I'm sure she did not mean to be cross. She seemed to me unhappy." Here Deirdrè sighed, thinking of poor Rose's unlucky passion for the man she could never marry.

"I'd rather she was ever so cross than unhappy. She is so good and kind, she deserves to be happy if ever a girl did."

"She does indeed. She has been always such a kind friend to me."

"That is indeed a proof of goodness. But she has also been a good friend to me."

"To you, Michael? I should hardly have called her your friend at all!"

"Ah, you don't know, Deirdrè. She used to talk about you to me whilst you were in the convent, and before. You became so cold and formal, Deirdrè, you changed so suddenly, I was afraid you knew. You did not know it, did you, dearest?"

"No."

"Ah, then you did dislike me?"

"No, Michael, never," said she sadly.

"Then why were you so—unkind? I'm certain you were never so unkind to any one before or since."

Mrs. Bellingham was too busy with the latchkey to answer. At last it went in. Still she made no reply as she walked upstairs.

"Why used you to make me so wretched, Deirdrè?"

She turned away her head; for a moment she did not speak. Then, looking at him, she said gravely, "My love, there are things we shall do well to hide—even from one another."

Then Hanlon knew that he had not loved alone.

CHAPTER XXI.

AT the office of the *Star*, while he was writing his leader, Hanlon thought of little else than Mrs. Bellingham. There was an exuberant gaiety about his manner, a genial and expansive lightheartedness which seemed like a new development of character to the people at the office, for they had known him only in his lovelorn and irritable days. His thoughts were of the most delicious and sentimental kind, and to prolong the pleasure of his walk home he made a long detour through the silent moonlit streets. When he reached his rooms the dawn was already lightening the sky, and there was the sharp chill that precedes the day.

He opened the door and went in. The entrance passage, narrow and dark, felt close and hot. It smelt of linoleum and old carpet. It jarred with Hanlon's mood; so, as he was not sleepy, he turned out again and walked towards the Regent's Park. He longed for the country, the dewy grass, and the white misty sky. At four o'clock on a hazy summer morning one can imagine the Regent's Park to be the country, especially when one is in love. But the stuffy passage and the linoleum, the dusty carpet and mahogany hat-stand, had brought Hanlon's thoughts from the empyrean, and as he sauntered down the classic Euston Road he began to review the money aspect of the situation. If not a romantic this was a pleasant subject for contemplation. During the last seven months or so he had been earning at the rate of eight hundred a year, and this, though his home was a heavy drag upon him, seemed to Hanlon a stupendous income. He felt that he would be justified in marrying at

once, and then all on a sudden it occurred to his mind that Mrs. Bellingham must have an income of her own, and a very comfortable one too.

The conviction was not merely unpleasant, it was absolutely sickening. Hanlon, who always thought in strong language, considered it loathsome and revolting. It was impossible that he should profit by Bellingham's money; yet it was not an easy matter to ask a woman to resign a certain income of three or four hundred a year when all you had to offer her was a livelihood earned day by day that might come to an end at any moment. Hanlon felt hot all over, and then suddenly cold. He felt as though he must go right off to St. David's Terrace at once and settle this unpleasant business. He really did not think that he was justified in asking Mrs. Bellingham to give up so much for him, and yet he could not endure the thought of being enriched by Bellingham's money. He had only to think of the way Bellingham had treated his wife in Ireland to feel a passion of scorn and hatred for the dead man and for his accursed money. Come what might, his wife should never have that money; and yet how would he ask her to give it up? He was sure that if she thought of the matter at all, she would feel, as he did, the degradation of enriching her second husband with the money of the husband she had not loved; but money had so small a place in her thoughts that probably such an idea would never occur to her mind. Hanlon resolved that he would bring the conversation round to the subject and make the suggestion come from herself.

He then felt a great deal easier in his mind, but also so chilly that he was quite glad to return to his lodgings, though the lateness of the hour and his eagerness to see Mrs. Bellingham put all idea of sleep out of the question. He merely changed his clothes, and it being seven o'clock, set out for South Kensington. He knew that it was the custom of Mrs. Bellingham to attend eight o'clock mass, and he thought that on this morning he would like to go with her, so when the

two ladies started out they saw Michael pacing up and down awaiting them.

Madame Lefevre gave a startled scream, and clasped her plump hands upon her well-developed chest. She thought that it was M. 'Anlon's ghost come to apprise them that he was no more.

But Mrs. Bellingham was not at all surprised. "I felt that you would come," she whispered, as she took her lover's hand, and Mr. Michael felt rather foolish, remembering what a chance thought that coming of his had been.

After breakfast Mademoiselle Lefevre went down to the district in Soho. Deirdrè had some twinges of conscience as she watched the omnibus rumble away, for she always had an underfeeling that what is pleasant must be wrong, and it was wonderfully pleasant to sit with Michael in Kensington Gardens under the trees.

They did not say very much, for Mrs. Bellingham was naturally silent, and Hanlon was not in a talkative mood. He fancied, too, that Deirdrè was preoccupied.

At last, after rather a long silence, she said suddenly, "Perhaps we may not be able to marry after all."

Hanlon started; he was so taken aback that he could not speak.

"No," said Mrs. Bellingham, with an ominous quivering of the lips and a very touching expression of love and sorrow in her eyes. "There was something peculiar about the will, I forget what. It was Rose who told me, and she is never very clear, but I am afraid it was that I might not marry again."

"Impossible," cried Hanlon, trying to reassure his own mind by much conviction of voice or manner. "It stands to reason that it's impossible."

"Do you *know* whether it is impossible?" she asked, leaning forward and looking at him earnestly.

"It must be. They might—— No, I'm sure it must be impossible."

"I don't know," said Deirdrè, looking at the grass at her

feet and averting her face a little. "There was something that—that—just at the last he thought unjust and wished to alter."

"The worst they could do would be to—deprive you of your income," said Hanlon, speaking rapidly. "It is for you to judge about that, my love, but——"

"I could not keep that," said Deirdrè, in a low but very determined voice.

Hanlon smiled. He had a remarkably sweet smile, and it was unusually tender just then.

"I knew you would feel like that, dearest," he said, "so I do not see what we have to fear."

But his voice had not a ring of conviction.

"But I am sure there was something," cried Deirdrè, clasping her hands with an agitated movement. "Mr. Stanley and Mr. Butler arranged about my going to Bonsecours. I had to get their permission, and I had to leave when they told me to come to London."

"Ah! I know what it is; of course, we have to get their consent. But you are very nearly one-and-twenty, so it is not very important."

"It was twenty-five, not twenty-one, Michael; I am almost sure of that."

"Well, then," said Hanlon, trying to smile, "we must get their consent. Let us go in and write to them at once." He could not rest till his fate was decided.

Deirdrè thought that her guardians would be less obstinate if Michael went to see them. In her own mind she believed no one could resist his fascination; but Hanlon, who had a less exalted opinion of his charms—though still a very fair one—thought that writing would be better, and while he wrote his letters to the guardians, Deirdrè sat down and tried to express to Mr. Butler that she should like to give up her income. They both felt that this magnanimity might soften the hearts of the higher powers, the Stanleys in particular, as they would profit by the transaction.

Poor Deirdrè was so intensely conscious of the reason which made her wish to give up her income that she knew she would never have the effrontery to make what seemed to her little less than a confession of guilt in any way than on paper; yet when Hanlon, in no very short time, had finished both his letters, she was still sitting with her eyes seeking inspiration from the ceiling, her natural genius having carried her no farther than "My dear Mr. Butler."

Hanlon showed her his epistles, with which, indeed, he was well satisfied. As for Deirdrè, her only regret was that he could not use them for one of his books; he must tell her what to say. So Michael wrote out a "rough suggestion," which might perhaps give her a hint, and which Mrs. Bellingham copied out word for word, and then having surveyed the joint production with a certain complacency, they went out together and took their letters to the post.

CHAPTER XXII.

You can imagine the consternation that those letters caused in the households of Butler and Stanley: how Mrs. Stanley screamed and wept, and declared that she had seen through the creature all along; how she wondered that that dreadful young man took the trouble to marry a woman whom he might have on so much easier terms; and how Stanley remarked that it was lucky that he was bent on marriage, since the other arrangement would not have deprived Mrs. Bellingham of her income; and how Susan was finally consoled at the thought of the five hundred a year which would now come to her.

James Butler also swore a little when he read the letters, and then he laughed, for he was rather amused by the ignorance of the young people in imagining that they could not marry without his consent, and touched by their Quixotic wish to give up the income that Mrs. Bellingham would have to resign whether she wished it or no. He was amused, too, at the fluent wording of her letter, and the uncertainty of the shalls and wills, by which sign he recognised the mind of Michael.

As for Mrs. Butler, the easy tears came to her kindly eyes. The poor young things must have suffered, she was sure; she hoped they would be as happy as dear Rosy with dear Alex, to whom she had always felt as towards a son. She supposed that Rosy had seen how the land lay, and that this was the cause of her friendship with that poor young man, whom she had always thought a very nice young fellow for his position, though, as far as that went, his position was the

same as Deirdre's; and she thought him a much more suitable husband than poor Arthur had been, though it was hard to think how soon even the best of us are forgotten, and what grief and consternation the re-appearance of the most loved of us would make after we had been under the sod a couple of years.

James said his wife was going too fast, and then laughing, he added that he did not know yet whether he could consent to the marriage. Hanlon had written a nice manly letter, or rather two nice manly letters, and seemed, from all he heard, a young man likely to get on. Still, he was old Hanlon's son, and politically as unsound as his father. He must see him, and must make inquiries concerning his character and the stability of his income. If these matters were not satisfactory, he should use his utmost influence to keep the young people apart. Then Rose laughed, and said that of *course* his influence, even unsupported by law, would count for everything, and that the Stanleys would be *very* anxious to prevent the marriage.

Just upon this Jones entered, and announced that Mr. and Mrs. Stanley would like to speak a moment with Mr. Butler.

James rose, and ran out laughing. "You've come about this absurd piece of news!" he cried, as he shook hands with his visitors.

"You may call it absurd," said Susan, tragically. "To me it is terrible."

"Poor thing. Yes, no doubt, no doubt," said James, consolingly, as he ushered her into the dining-room; "so it is, very sad; so soon forgotten. We were just saying so among ourselves. Ah, well! 'twould be the same with all of us, I suppose."

"*I* have not forgotten Arthur, and he was only my brother. *I* can't speak of him now without cr-cr-crying," sobbed Mrs. Stanley, "and yet *I* had no nervous illness, and did not go about calling out for sympathy. It was remorse, Mr. Butler, not sorrow, that made that woman ill."

"Oh, no, no, no," said honest James; "you're grieved and sore, Mrs. Stanley, and no wonder; but I don't believe the girl ever thought of young what-d'ye-callum till she had a right to."

This was not a candid statement on James Butler's part.

Fred Stanley thought his wife was rather hard on the girl. For his part, he did not believe there was anything criminal between her and the Irishman, though he could not suppose poor Arthur would have made that will unless he saw a probability of a second marriage, and of a second marriage of which he would disapprove.

"He seems also to have seen a probability of her becoming a nun," cried Butler, staunchly. "*That* does not look as though he suspected her of depravity; and for my part, whatever I might say of her now, I should know she's as good as gold next time I saw her face."

"Isn't that like a man?" cried Mrs. Butler. "If she was ugly he would think her wicked, but just because she's pretty there is no harm in her."

"I see you agree with me?" cried Susan. "Men never see these things."

"I don't know," replied Mrs. Butler, thoughtfully. "I shouldn't be surprised if they had cared for each other in quite a proper way. Of course we were all very fond of Arthur; but she was young enough to be his daughter. It seems a little odd that she should want to give up his money."

"She can't help it," said Susan, quickly.

"She didn't know that," said Butler. "I never told her; but here's her letter, asking me how she could make it over to you."

"It's not her letter at all," said Susan, after she had read it, "I'm sure it's not her letter. The man dictated it to her. I always said she was the worst of the two. *He* seems to have some sense of shame."

"He couldn't have made her write it," snapped Rose. And then Mrs. Stanley took refuge in tears.

Whilst the Butler ladies were consoling her, the men had a little talk apart. Stanley said he washed his hands of the whole business, Butler knew so much more of the girl than he did. Besides, there was no use making objections. If they had made up their minds, who was to stop them? He could not think why, since they had nothing to lose, they had bothered about people's consent; unless, as was probable, they did not very particularly wish to give up the income, and hoped to come to a compromise. However, he should let them know at once that the fact of the marriage deprived the woman of her money.

By the way, had Butler ever seen the young man? No, Mr. Butler said, he had not. He should write and tell him to call on him, that he might see what sort of fellow he was. He flattered himself that his influence counted for something with Deirdre; and if the young man had no prospects, he should feel it his duty to persuade them to postpone the marriage. Mr. Butler did not think it worth while to explain to his co-executor that Hanlon was obviously under the impression that consent was necessary; nor, when he wrote to Michael, did he enlighten him. It would be time enough for that when he had seen if the marriage were desirable.

Hanlon had never crossed the Butlers' threshold. He knew very well that he was not considered worthy of that honour; and, to do him justice, he did not resent that feeling. Indeed, had the Butlers asked him to their house, he would not have gone. In his heart he stigmatised James Butler as the murderer of Deirdre's father and his own brother—as the oppressor of the poor, and the man who had wantonly cast out the destitute to perish in the winter. He was a bad landlord—a rack-renter, an absentee, a man who had refused to let lands on any but yearly tenancy. In a word, he was guilty of all the sins which, in Hanlon's estimation, are without forgiveness.

Hanlon could hardly bring himself to enter under that roof to behold the magnificence and luxury (the Butlers lived very

quietly) that was ground out of the blood of the poor. That such infamy should dwell in high places, that such men should prosper even upon earth, was a sin crying for vengeance. Dineen's blood was crying night and day for vengeance against this man! Hanlon felt he must control his wrath, must dissemble and speak smoothly to this tyrant, who, after slaying Deirdre's father and his brother, might part him from his darling. He remembered how good Butler had been to the orphan girl, and then he cursed him for making her an orphan.

Fury, defiance, righteous scorn—all the qualities which we keep out of sight in polite society—blazed in his candid eyes as he demanded, in a tone that withered Jones to the earth, was Mr. Butler at home?

James Butler, smoking his morning cigarette, and reading his *Morning Post*, was awaiting the interview with no feeling more intense than a slight boredom and a comfortable self-pity at being so troubled by his bailiff's daughter. He was reading a fiery invective against landlords that had been uttered last night by the member for Ballynadere, and was smiling grimly to think how little Mr. O'Reilly knew of a landlord's troubles, when Jones announced Mr. 'Anlon, and a vision of youth, scorn, defiance, and trepidation stood before him.

Butler looked up and at once felt very much amused. He liked the handsome, clear-cut face; and the flashing eyes and quivering nostrils recalled a long-past day when he too had braced his courage to defy an unwilling guardian. "Good morning," he said kindly. "I forgot when I wrote to you that you had to be up so late at night. I'm afraid I named an inconveniently early hour. I didn't think of it till this morning. Take a seat, won't you?"

Hanlon looked at the man in amazement. It was more the system than the individual that was to blame. "Thank you, I—I——" He was going to say he preferred standing; but he remembered how much depended on this interview, and

was, moreover, disarmed by this gracious reception, so he took the chair James Butler offered him. "The hour is of no consequence at all, thank you. It only takes forty minutes to get here."

"I thought, perhaps, you came round by Mrs. Bellingham's," said Butler, smiling.

"I did," said Hanlon, turning very red, for which ingenuous blushing Butler liked him the better. "I had my breakfast there," he added simply.

"Ah! I suspected something of the kind; and my little daughters met you there at tea last night, I believe. That sort of thing is very pretty and natural to your time of life; but I must know what you have to offer Mrs. Bellingham before it can go on with my consent. You must show me that in some way the marriage will be an advantage to Mrs. Bellingham."

"I don't see how that can be, sir, in any worldly sense," said Hanlon, honestly. "Five hundred a year is more for one than eight for two; and my income may cease at any moment by my death. If I died to-morrow I would not leave two hundred pounds behind me. Of course I will save; and before I marry I will insure my life; but, in case of my death, that would be very little compared to what Mrs. Bellingham has now. Bellingham's widow has a certain social position, and my wife would have none. You must see, at least as well as I, that from a worldly point of view, she is better as she is."

"I was hoping you would make me alter that opinion. It is, you see, my duty to look after her interests."

"I can't say what I feel about other things," cried Michael. "How can I tell to you, a—a stranger—how much I love her, how much I believe she loves me. I know that she would be happier poor with me than rich without me. I sha'n't plead my own happiness with you, because that does not concern you in the least."

"Oh, come," said Butler, suavely.

"'Twould ruin my life to be parted from her. She is more to me than anything—than everything in this world. You have but to look at her, sir, to see what—what she must be to the man that loves her. But 'tis not of myself that I would speak, 'tis of Mrs. Bellingham. If you part us it will make her miserable. I can't tell how ever she came to care for me; 'tis as wonderful to me as ever it can be to you. You must not think that I feel worthy of her—but what man is? But now that she has given me her heart, she'll never give it to another man, no matter who he be."

"Bellingham," murmured Mr. Butler.

"She was a child," cried Hanlon. "What should she know of love? I'm not saying that she didn't care for him. She has told me nothing of that. But it can't have been the same. I've thought myself I was in love before, but it was not the same. Nothing of the same sort," he added more calmly.

"I daresay not," said Butler, smiling. "You do seem very much in love now."

"Who would not be?" cried Hanlon, the tears starting to his eyes. "Who would not be? Oh! when I see her I know I will never win her. Oh, my God! my God!"—he sprang up from his seat and turned away.

For a minute Butler could not speak. He was moved by the young man's emotion.

"Come, come," he said kindly; "it does not seem to me at all so strange that she should love you. I'm sure I have no wish, even had I the power, to make either you or her unhappy. I don't rate love so high in married happiness as you do; but even I should price it above a couple of hundred a year. You are both young, and if money were the only thing I should not hesitate."

"'Tis my class," said Hanlon, "you dislike; but it is her class too."

"Well, by her education and her marriage with Bellingham she has raised herself above her father's class, and so have

you, by your work, raised yourself," he added smiling, "above yours."

"Oh no," cried Michael, quickly. He was by no means ashamed of his class.

"Indeed you have," said Butler, reassuringly, "and you will raise yourself much more. I make no doubt that by the time you are forty you will be in a very good position. Talent is thought more of every year. People will soon forget your humble origin."

"I don't think I wish they should, sir," cried Hanlon. "I like my own class and my own people best. I am as proud of my father as if he were a lord."

"That is a very nice feeling," said Butler, approvingly, "a very commendable feeling, and yet—you must not think I mean to wound you—but, to be candid, it is your father, not his class, that I object to."

"Ah! 'Tis the Ballymoneyboy affair," began Hanlon, coldly.

"Just so. I cannot think your father behaved well——"

"Pray don't let us speak of that. I shall say things I am sorry for," cried Hanlon, pacing up and down. "Had you been there, Mr. Butler, had you seen the people dying of cold and hunger, would you have done less than my father did? It was not my father who behaved ill; he did his bare duty, and you, sir, made him suffer for it."

"He should have given up Dineen's murderers," said Butler, gravely. "I would have had him back if he had done that."

"I am certain he knows no more of that than you do," said Hanlon, with some spirit. "My father is the last man to receive that sort of confidence. You may depend, those wretches kept their secret pretty close; besides, they would as soon tell you as tell my father."

"Well, hardly that," said Butler. "They know I would have had 'em all hanged with little mercy, the cowardly wretches, and you don't mean to tell me your father would do that."

"I don't suppose he would; certainly I would not. They were fiends, I grant you; but 'twas their distress made them mad. My own brother died on the road that day, and our mother carried him dead in her arms to our uncle's house. That sort of memory in a family——"

"Well, well, we won't discuss that subject any more. We sha'n't agree upon it. Perhaps there may have been faults on both sides. I'm sure I'm sorry anyone should suffer." This was quite true; the sight of suffering always touched James Butler. "I cannot think that your father behaved well by me, and I see you don't think I behaved well by him. But after all, it's not an affair between me and your father that we have to think of, but between you and Mrs. Bellingham. So if the accounts I hear of you are as good as I believe they will be, and you feel justified in asking her to give up her income, I don't think there is any more to be said," he concluded, holding out his hand. "Besides, you know, if you young people are bent on marriage, I cannot prevent you."

"I did not know that," said Hanlon, as amiably as he could; but he felt that Butler had taken an unfair advantage of his ignorance.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"He behaved after the manner of his kind in not telling me. 'Twas conduct just worthy of a rack-renting absentee."

It was Hanlon who spoke. He was recounting to Deirdre the scene between Mr. Butler and himself. His tone was half amused, half indignant, and his Irish accent, which Mrs. Bellingham thought so distinguished and beautiful, was rather more pronounced than usual.

Mrs. Bellingham made a little murmur of excuse for the offending Butler, but Hanlon, with an eloquent gesture, went on, "They lost not a moment in letting us know that we had been guilty of misplaced generosity regarding that money, and it would not have cost them much trouble to tell us the rest. No, he was glad I'd made a fool of myself."

"I expect he feared you would not go if you knew, and that he wanted to see you," said Mrs. Bellingham, incoherently. A desire to see Michael was one of those strong natural instincts which excuse conduct that is quite unjustifiable.

"Well, that would only be natural," laughed Hanlon, throwing up his head. He could not take himself quite at the lady's valuation. "But it makes me mad to think that I carped and cringed to that fellow for nothing."

Mrs. Bellingham laughed her quiet, chuckling, amused, infantine laugh. "I should like to see you cringe and carp."

"Ah, no; indeed you would not." Hanlon was serious in a moment. "I felt a reptile, I did indeed—such a worm, such a mean-spirited cur. I grovelled at his feet. I'd have gone on my knees to move that man. I hate myself when I

think of it. But in the same case I'd do it again," and Mr. Hanlon soothed his wounded feelings in the orthodox and approved manner. He needed a good deal of this sort of comfort, for his pride had really been hurt, and now that he knew how powerless authority was, he wished with all his heart that he had defied authority.

But life was too pleasant for this small humiliation to rankle, and during the swift-flying summer months he was intensely, absolutely happy. Who would not be happy in his case? He was loved by the dearest and loveliest and best of women, and she had consented to become his wife in the early days of October, which was the month of Hanlon's holiday from the *Star*. Hanlon talked a deal about that holiday. We will be married before the holiday. When my holiday comes we will do this—we will go here, and there, and everywhere in the holiday. Often these references to the holiday would be made at Cuckham and Taplow, where the two pairs of lovers, chaperoned by Mademoiselle Lefevre and Jim Butler, spent many summer days. Then Captain Campbell would open his sleepy eyes, as much as to say, "My good fellow, if this is work I don't think you can need much holiday."

It is a fact that Hanlon's work cut a very poor figure that summer. His hack-work for the *Star* and the weeklies had to be done, but he wrote scarcely a chapter of the novel he had on hand, and his "Popular History of the Niam-Niams, and other Man-eating Tribes of Central Africa," came to a dead stand. The history was overdue, and was the cause of much anxiety to Mrs. Bellingham. If Michael looked pale, or tired, or was silent for two minutes together, she fancied that he must be harassed by "another letter from those bothering publishers," who, of course must be in a great hurry for so saleable a book, and one which would supply a want that had been long and widely felt. But whether because, as Hanlon said, there was no hurry, since July was out of the publishing season, or whether Messrs.

Tower and Trot guessed how pleasantly the young historian was passing his time, certain it is that they forbore to worry him with their importunities.

Every now and then Hanlon's conscience smote him at the thought of the amount of time he was wasting. He wasted a great many days up the river, and a great many mornings in Kensington Gardens, and not a few hours he spent unemployed in Mrs. Bellingham's parlour. Sometimes, when their talk had been serious, and Hanlon realised the brevity of life and the irrevocability of wasted hours, he used to think that the ghost of that happy idle summer would haunt him in after years. And yet—and yet, against all precedent and morality—it is the time spent at his desk that Michael Hanlon now regrets, and the hours virtuously employed in the pursuit of fame and sixpences are those he now calls wasted. For he has found that he can write more amusing novels with a heavy heart than a light one, and that a burden of care detracts nothing from the authenticity of the "History of the Niam-Niams." Moreover, in these later days he questions whether his productions be essential to the well-being of the human race, a subject on which he had no manner of doubt when he was young.

That summer sped by so quickly that really he had no time for work. The clock flew round and round with such surprising rapidity that he was always late for everything, and lived in a state of perpetual hurry. Mrs. Bellingham, too, found it impossible to get on with her momentous occupations. She never had time to settle down to her embroidery, and that bunch of carnations (for Church decoration) that she was making out of goose feathers hung on hand an unconscionable time. Mademoiselle Lefevre has even hinted that the visits of Madame Bellingham to her district were less frequent than of yore.

So the weeks fled on, and Hanlon's expectation that he would find heaps of time for work in September was not realised, for when the important question of the wedding-tour

came under discussion, he found that Deirdrè did not in any way second his proposal that they should pass it in Ireland. That being so, Hanlon felt it his duty to go home for a couple of days before his marriage. He had not been to Limerick for two years, and he could not endure that his people should think that the new love had driven out the older affection for his home. So towards the end of the month he bade Deirdrè a tremendous farewell, as befitted an absence that was to last for five whole days.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was on Friday evening that Hanlon said farewell to his lady-love, from whose lodgings he went straight to the office of the *Star*. There he remained until between three and four in the morning, writing a leading article on bee-keeping, expatiating on the advanced state of that industry in foreign countries, and the incredible blindness of this land in neglecting a source of national wealth which, if cultivated, might go far to restore the agricultural districts to the prosperity they had enjoyed in the days of the Corn Laws. Hanlon knew less about bee-keeping than tea-growing, so the article touched on an immense variety of topics—the ancient Greeks and John the Baptist, polished floors and shining wainscot, all being pressed into the service of filling a column and three-quarters of a September paper; but when the bee-keeping was set up in type and reduced to precisely the right number of words, Hanlon had still nearly three hours before his train would leave Euston Station. So he went to his lodgings and wrote a letter to Mrs. Bellingham, telling her some of the many things that he had forgotten to mention in the eight brief hours of their parting interview.

No one of these things was of itself so urgent that it could not have waited until Hanlon's arrival in Cloughdunrum, or even till his return to London. But who is there that has never written a letter that was not, from a business point of view, quite necessary? And sentimentally, at least, this letter—the first love-letter he had ever written to Deirdrè—was important, since it gave immense happiness to both the young people.

Hanlon was in the highest of high spirits. Certainly he had

bidden farewell to the dearest thing he had in the world, and the memory of that parting had made his eyes rather dim for a time. Still, the parting was only for four days, and when he returned it would be to his wedding. Besides, he had not been home for two years, not since that melancholy journey he had made with the Bellinghams; and now how happy he was! He was going to marry the best and most beautiful woman the world had ever seen, and in the meantime he was going to see his people with the fair one's portrait in his breast pocket. No wonder that his happiness was infectious, and that he and the other smoking second-class passengers agreed that they had never had so pleasant a run to Holyhead.

Hanlon was to break his journey that night at Cloughdun-drum, where his brother Dan was engaged in literary pursuits, he being the acting editor of *The Cloughdun-drum Sunburst and Ballyragget Weekly Messenger*. The Cloughdun-drum editor was a sad-looking youth, with hair that his mother thought auburn, but which was, to other eyes, of a brilliant scarlet, and a white lantern-jawed face not remarkable for beauty. His figure seemed little more handsome than his face; but of this it was difficult to judge, for his checked suit was of so strange a cut and antiquarian design that few men would have looked well in it. The position of the buttons and buttonholes gave rise to the suspicion that it had been turned.

It being Saturday, the *Sunburst* was issued—it rarely achieved a 'Later Edition'—and the editor was at liberty. The brothers had a very cosy evening together, Dan smoking in sympathetic silence while Michael enlarged on his happiness and good fortune as zealously as he had, not three years before, cursed the splendours of Miss Dolan's eyes in the same back parlour, and to the same taciturn and gentle listener.

"Well, are we goin' to bed at all?" asked Dan, when at length his brother puffed three whiffs of his pipe in silence.

"It's only ten minutes of twelve, and I couldn't sleep yet; but if you are tired, Dan——"

"Me tired? Sure no! I'm wantin' to see all I can of ye, Mick."

"But you'll go home with me to-morrow, Dan?"

"Not possible. I must report the meetin' at Ballyragget. I've promised to speak there, too, for that mattur."

"When were you home last, Dan?" asked Michael, after a pause.

"Six weeks since I went for a Sunday. Ye'll find father a good bit aged, Mick. I thought 'um lookin' very sick and weak. Mother wouldn't say that they were poor, but they did not know I was comin' and there was no meat for dinner. Mother was sewin', though it was Sunday," he went on in his quiet melancholy voice, "and I'm sure the work was for none of us."

"Terrible. Dan, how much have you been helping them?"

"Very little, Mick; 'tis but little I can do. But if mother would happen to say anything to ye about the rise in me salary—I'm glad I remembered to mention to ye—no, no more whiskey, Mick—that I got one in the summer."

"Is that so, Dan? Then what may you be earning now?" cried Michael, pleased and interested.

"Well, that's hardly a fair question," replied the other shortly.

"Ah, Dan!" cried his brother reproachfully. "No, Dan, can't see any good in it at all. I shall tell mother that there's no truth at all in your rise. If there was any need for you to do it I'd be the last to say a word, but I would be thankful to do more than mother'll let me, and never feel the want of it."

"Ye keep the boys at school, I know, Mick; and mother told me ye paid the rent—she cried when she told me that—and that ye send 'em money too. They lost last year on the shop. She didn't tell me, and ye mustn't ask how I know, but they did—last year and three years since too—and father borrowed money to buy the stock. 'Tis that keeps them so

miserably poor. But you must not be sayin' a word a' this to mother; she doesn't think I know. Indeed, I'll not be sure that she knows herself."

"However can ye know, then, Dan?"

"Ye promised not to ask, Mick, and I don't know how I came to tell ye; certainly I wasn't meaning to say a word about it when ye came. I really think we'd best be going to bed; ye had no sleep last night."

"Well, let's be off," said the elder, and then, when the light was out, he asked how was Kitty Dolan? He had forgotten her till then, he said.

"She's Kitty Quin," said Dan, laughing, and Michael said he was very glad, though he thought she was a deal too good for Quin. It seemed strange to think that he had ever imagined he cared for Kitty. He had not known what love meant in those days. Dan said, was that so? and smiled to remember what a good imitation of love Mick had made that night when he stamped up and down the room, and then thrust his fists into his eyes and howled like a baby.

Dan had been very sympathetic to his brother, the more so that the one passion of his own life (Dan was at that time one-and-twenty) was a happy one. For the sub-editor was attached to the daughter of the nominal editor and proprietor of the *Sunburst and Messenger*, a young lady Dan's senior by more than seven years, of angular figure, but fine development of brow and mind. In fact, it was her mental power that captivated the young journalist. She taught him the folly of belief, the fallacy of creation, and how everything was a development of something that had gone before; and the father of all was not the loving Godhead whom poor simple Mary Hanlon had taught her boy to worship, but the interesting earth-worm.

All that had happened three years ago, and by this time Dan and Miss Brophy had traced their pedigree far behind the earth-worm, and looked upon the mushroom as a comparatively recent ancestor. They had swept away from their

minds any lingering hopes they may have once had for immortality, their reason assuring them that this was their one and only life. Reason having gone so far, one would have thought she would have suggested to these young people that they should make the most of the one life offered them, and that there being no Deity to please or to anger, their lives were their own, and any pleasures lawful to them; but so far from this being the case, you could not find in all Ireland a more sincerely pure and upright young fellow than Dan Hanlon, and Ellen Brophy was an angel to the poor.

On Sunday Michael went on to Limerick by the train, which should have got in at half-past three, but it was after four when he reached the corn-store facing the Thomond Bridge. The house was a shabby little place—a shop, a parlour behind it, and a kitchen built out at the back, and three bedrooms above. The parlour, dreary and small, had a view of the yard and the water-butt. The floor was covered by a carpet much obscured by darns, and a marvellous hearthrug of home manufacture. But when the worn, faded curtains were drawn, and the lamp alight, and a bright peat fire smouldering on the hearth, it seemed to Michael Hanlon a very cosy little place, and the room, next after the room in which Deirdre sat, the dearest in the world.

Old Daniel Hanlon is sadly aged and changed since we saw him thirteen years ago at Ballymoneyboy. His hair is quite white now, and very thin; his face is almost fleshless, fallen into deep lines, and with the restless, discontented look of one who has found life very bitter. His eyes, too, are dim and unsteady; he does not lift them to meet the clear large gaze of his wife or his bright-eyed son. That eviction first broke Daniel Hanlon's heart; he had hardly smiled since then. And in truth he had small cause to smile, for all he had undertaken had failed. He had bought dear and sold cheap, bought again without the money to pay, borrowed money, and then borrowed again to pay the interest, and was now in a hopeless entanglement of poverty and debt.

The burden of the poverty fell on Mary's broad shoulders, but her husband did not tell her of his debts. For the last thirteen years Mrs. Hanlon has been engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle with hunger, and of late she has had more than once to eat the bread that tastes so bitter to a mother—the bread that her sons have earned, and that the poor boys can ill afford to spare.

Still Mrs. Hanlon is comparatively little changed by those years. Her hair is a trifle grey, and lies closer to her handsome face than it did of old, her step a little slower, and her figure a trifle heavier than it was thirteen years ago; but the good, sweet, honest face is even kinder, more loving, and more motherly than it was of yore. In character, too, Mary is but little changed; she is the same great-hearted, loving woman, still passionately devoted to her sorrow-stricken, ailing husband, to her six living children—fondest of all of her boy in heaven.

Old Daniel Hanlon is in his chair on the warmest side of the hearth, his pipe in his mouth and his glass of whiskey-and-water on the mantelshelf, convenient. On the other side the fire sits his wife, with Michael on the hearthrug at her feet. She loves to have him there, to pass her hand over his curly hair. He is her eldest son, a man to be looked up to and revered—a man whose advice is to be sought, whose judgment is as near infallibility as human judgment can be; but, by some sweet, feminine unreasoning, he is at the same time a baby still—still little Mick, to be petted and caressed. In a word, he is her son, and the love she has for him and he for her is the most beautiful and divine thing under heaven.

Deirdre's portrait was in Mrs. Hanlon's other hand. "She is very beautiful, Mick," she said, "and she looks good."

"She is as good as you are, mother—and as beautiful," said Michael, looking up reverently into the sweet, handsome face.

"And as big?" said Mrs. Hanlon, smiling.

"No, not as big yet," answered Michael, laughing. "Ah,

mother, you'll come and see her. When we are married you will love her, won't you, mother dear?"

"I won't be able to help it, Mick, if she is as sweet as she looks. But I can't help rather wishin' that ye had a girl's first love, Michael," she added gently, looking towards her husband with loving eyes. "I can't understand anny woman lovin' twice." Michael said nothing, but a great honest blush spread over his face and neck and ears. "But, perhaps, ye are her first love, Mick, poor child. Then why, I wonder, was she after mar'yin' at all?"

"She never told me that," said Michael. "But, you see, she was very young, and she had no home."

"Ah, the poor child, she had no home, thin? She was a gohverness, ye say?"

"Yes," said Michael very faintly. He did not wish his parents to know that Mrs. Bellingham was Dineen's daughter.

"Deirdrè?" said Mrs. Hanlon, thoughtfully. "It's a most uncommon name. I disremember knowin' but wun 'Deirdrè. What might her maiden name be, Michael?"

"Dineen," answered Michael, turning his face away.

"Deirdrè Dineen!" cried his father, trembling. "Good God! Good God! Where may she come from?" he added, pale as death. For a moment Michael made no reply. "Where may she come from, Michael? Answer me."

"Father," said the young man, rising to his feet, "she's not to be judged for her father's sins. It is no fault of hers that she is Tom Dineen's daughter."

"Ah," groaned the old man, standing up and groping like one blind, "my son, my son, ye *cannot* mar'y Dineen's daughter!" He staggered and fell against the wall.

"Dan," cried the wife, throwing her arms about him, "Dan, is it sick that ye are? Sure, dear, we'll go upstairs. Mick, darlin', open the door, and we'll be helpin' father up to bed."

"Don't come, Mick," said the old man hoarsely. "Marey, don't let 'um come."

Michael opened the door quiet and unsympathetic. What right had they to dictate whom he should marry? He sat down by the fire and lit his pipe, and listened aggrieved and affronted to the voices overhead.

Mrs. Hanlon helped her husband to a chair and knelt down beside him. "Dan, darlin'," she said, taking his wasted hand into her warm, broad palm, "Dan, how can ye be so unforgivin'? We have no right to stop Mick from mar'ying any woman. What right a' we to judge even such as Dineen?" Dan Hanlon only groaned. "You're a hard man, Dan," she said reproachfully, "to visit the iniquities a' the fathers——"

"Marey, don't talk like that. My son must never mar'y Dineen's daughter."

"Ye cannot stop 'um, Dan. He is a man."

"But we must stop 'um, Marey. Oh, Marey! Marey!" The old man hid his face in his hands. "Ah, God forgive me, Marey!" he went on after a long pause. "The Lord in heaven forgive me!" He drew the woman to him and kissed her fervently, reverently; and she, though she was fifty, kissed him as she had kissed him when they both were young.

"Kiss me wunst more, Marey. Ah! 'tis the last kiss that ever I'll ask av ye. Oh, Marey! Marey! however will I tell ye?"

The woman looked at him in terrified surprise. What could it be that Dan so feared to tell her?

"Don't look at me like that," said the man sharply. He rose and turned away from her. "Marey, 'twas me that killed her fa——"

"No, Dan! No!" she said, clinging to him. "Dan, man, ye are mad! Ye never did ut! ye could not do ut! Ah," she wailed "my poor old man is mad! Ye are mad, Dan, darlin'! The hand of the Lord is heavy on ye, dear. Sure, Dan, ye're mad, ye're mad," and she sank sobbing to the floor.

"No, Marey, I'm not mad, but oft I've been like ut. My sin is very heavy on me sowl."

Mary was still cowering on the floor, sobbing long shivering sobs; and Dan, sitting by the bed, hid his face in the pillow and wept bitterly. Poor Michael, wandering up and down the little parlour, heard their weeping and wondered at it. He resented, too, that they should mourn at that which made him so honoured and so happy.

Mrs. Hanlon was the first to speak. "Tell me ye did not do ut, Dan," she said, going up to him and laying her hand upon his shoulder. "Dan, it is nine-and-twenty years since we were wed. Ye'll not be telling me that, afthur all these years, I'm not knowin' what sort a' man ye are. Ye nevr were the man to speak an unkind word to anyone; ye nevr struck wan a' the children; ye could not hurt a dumb creature, dear. Dan, man"—she pushed his thin white hair from his forehead—"Dan, ye *could* not bury a man alive!"

"Not that, Marey; they interred 'um for dead, but 'twas myself that shot 'um. I thought I shot 'um dead. I'm not mad now; but I hope in God I was mad that night. I nevr thought to do ut; but that day, whin I sah Johnny dead across yer knee, it come over me that Dineen's life would pay for his. Do ye mind, Marey, how I came into Mahony's room and found ye with the child?"

"Can ye think, Dan, I'll disremember the day when Johnny died?"

"I'd the revolvur in me pocket, and I schwor to meself that av I meet Dineen that should be a sign——"

Mrs. Hanlon moaned. "Go on," she said.

"I met 'um at the cross-roads by the plowed fields. I see ut ahl as av it wus yesterday. He was just goin' home. I put ahl the six barrr'ls into um, and thin turned back towards Ballymoneyboy. When I got to the ould place, Pat Lanigan cried out in Irish that I had best take care, for the boys was on the look-out for Dineen ahl the road up Ballymoneyboy, and I so near his heighth. Dineen must a' suspected, and gone home by the fields. I told 'em what I'd done, and the three of 'em went to bury 'um. I'd nothing to say to that,

Marey, and since I knowed the poor fellow was alive, it's little peace a' mind I've had night or day. But what was the use to tell, Marey? No wun was suspected, and why would I bring shame on ye and the children, and go to hell before me time?"

"Ah, Daniel, don't say that. Pray and repent, and ye may be forgiven even for that great wickedness! 'Tis small use to reproach ye, Dan. Yer heart can a' left ye no peace or happiness; but how could ye make a little girl an orphan? Dan, how could ye throw that child upon the world? I'm not sayin' that Dineen didn't deserve his fate; but who were ye to judge 'um? and, bad as he was, what had his little daughter done that ye should ruin the poor child's life? An' Michael!" At the thought of her son's grief the mother's sobs burst forth anew. "Michael," she moaned, "my son, my son Michael!"

Old Hanlon sat stunned and silent. What could he say to comfort her—he who had brought on her this misery and shame?

He dared not touch her, the good, true woman who had shared his sorrows and borne without murmur or complaint his shiftless poverty and want. And now, as she crouched there sobbing, he knew that her own ruined honour and peace of mind had no place in her thoughts—that her tears were tears of pity for her sinful husband, and the sorrow his crime must bring upon her son.

"Marey," he said at last, "why would I ruin Michael?" She looked up, not understanding. "Why would I be tellin' 'um?" he explained. "Why should they ever know ut? Let 'em ma'ry and be happy, and——"

She understood him now. She ceased weeping, and sprang up from the floor. "You wicked man!" she cried; and he quailed beneath her righteous scorn. "You wicked man! the very earth Dineen's blood fell on should cry out for vengeance! Should we ask Heaven's blessin' on that mar'ge, Daniel?—the mar'ge a' the girl who found her father's

body, and the son a' the man who—who killed 'um. No! we've had wickedness enough, Daniel Hanlon! We've wrecked Michael's life and hers; but we cannot let 'em make that fearful mar'ge."

"I'll not be able to be tellin' Michael," said Hanlon, feebly. "Marey, I cannot tell 'um."

"But, Daniel, ye must tell 'um."

The old man staggered to the door; he put his hand on the latch and then he turned, and with a moan sank into a chair. "Marey, I cannot bear ut. I'll not be able to bear my son's scorn. Marey," he said, lifting his head and looking at her piteously, "I cannot tell 'um."

The woman came up to him and laid her hand upon his shoulder. "Dan, 'tis a fearful punishment." And then the full consciousness of what her husband's shame and grief and misery must be came upon her. Fearful as was his sin, that punishment might well be more than he could bear.

"I cannot tell 'um," sighed the old man.

And she, being accustomed to bear her husband's burdens, said, "Will I tell 'um, Dan?"

Old Hanlon bowed his head, and his wife left him.

CHAPTER XXV.

MRS. HANLON went down into the parlour, where her son was still pacing impatiently to and fro. He had heard his parents moving in the room upstairs—had heard them sob, and the sound of their agitated voices. All that had made him angry and impatient. It was not because he was a loving son and a generous one that he should not choose his own wife. He felt his father's interference to be unwarrantable and without reason; but when his mother came into the room, the look on her face told him that something serious had happened.

"Is father sick?" he asked.

Mrs. Hanlon said nothing; she hung down her head, for she could not look her boy in the face just then. How could she tell him, when the worst he dreamed of was sickness? What a small grief it seemed—sickness! Death itself had no sorrow to compare with this calamity.

"Is he sick?" repeated Michael.

"He is not well," said Mrs. Hanlon, sadly; "but I would sooner have to tell ye he was dead, my son, than say what I must say to-night."

"Oh, mother!" he began; and then, frightened by her strange, sad manner, he said quickly, "Deirdre's not dead?"

"Not that I know of, Michael, dear. But, my son, she must be dead to ye. Don't be askin' why," she went on, rather wildly, "for, Michael, the reason is— Ah!" she cried, hiding her face with her hands, "the reason is more tur'ble than annything ye can imagine. Don't ask me why, my son; for yer own sake, don't ask me why."

Michael came up to his mother and put his arms lovingly round her neck.

"Don't weep, mother," he said, "don't weep; I'll not ask what may be the matter, for nothing but death shall part me and Deirdrè."

"But this must part ye, Michael," she said, gently pushing him from her. "Oh, my son!" she cried, looking into the young face that was so dear to her, "my son, 'tis harrd for me that bore ye to break yer heart that's dearer to me than me own. Michael," she went on, signing him to sit down, and kneeling down beside him, "Michael, try to forgive me and yer father. Ah, darlin', 'tis no smahl thing I am askin' ye, for, love, ye cannot mar'y Dineen's daughter."

"Why?" asked the young man hoarsely.

His tongue was so parched he could hardly frame the word. His lips were rigid on his teeth; all the colour had left his face; even his lips were white, and a fearful terror came over him. He thought he knew what his mother was going to say.

"My son, try to forgive yer father. When he sinned he did not think—he——"

"He killed Dineen," whispered Michael in a husky voice, that had no surprise in its dull misery. Yet he was astounded that his mother did not rise up and upbraid him for the impious thought.

But for reply she gave a long, heartbroken wail, and Michael knew that he had guessed the truth.

They did not speak, they did not move. What comfort could the mother give to her son? And he—shattered, heartbroken, disgraced, deprived by one blow of all that makes life dear—of his love, his honour, his father—what could he say? What could he think of but his woe, and the misery of the dearer life that was blighted with his own? His very mother seemed defiled by the sinful secret; she must have guessed, and her life, which had appeared so noble to him, was a hypocrisy.

"When did he tell you?" he asked at last.

"He has been after tellin' me upstairs."

Then he bent forward and laid his head on her shoulder.

"Mother, we must be everything to one another." With the words came the thought of her who was really all to him—of the woman who, dear as she was to him, loved him yet more than he loved her. "Ah! it will kill her, it will kill her!"

"Well," said Mrs. Hanlon, "I'm thinkin' that would be the best."

Then he told her of Deirdre's fears and horrors, of how that black crime had shattered her health. "She would find out by instinct if I married her without telling."

"Never a minute's peace could ye know av ye did that, my son; that could never make ye happy. Besides, 'tis against nature; ye couldn't do ut, Michael. 'Tis to loneliness and sorrow ye are doomed, my child; and so, poor soul, is she. Sad ye must be, Michael, darlin', but thank God ye need not be wicked."

Michael said bitterly that he was not so sure of that. There was something in blood, and he was his father's son.

Mrs. Hanlon did not reprove him; he had a right to say bitter things, she thought, and her own heart was full of resentment towards her husband when she saw Michael's pale face and bloodshot eyes.

Though the sad evening seemed unending, it was late before the mother and son went upstairs. They sat together in dreary silence, Mary because she dreaded facing her husband, as though she were the guilty one, and Michael because he cared not—indeed, hardly knew—where he was. It was nearly two o'clock when he went to his room. He sat down by the little writing-table, and buried his face in his hands. How would he tell her? He should go back to-morrow, and she would come running down, pleased and surprised to see him so soon, and he— No, he could never say it to her, that was impossible. Look at the wounded heart

while he was breaking it? Watch the writhings of the soul that he was torturing? It was impossible—he could not do it. If once he saw that well-loved face! Ah me! it did not do to think of that sweet face. The best would be to write—to write and never see her again. Yes, he would write; then, at any rate, he should not see her eyes, he would not hear her voice. He would write that very night; it would be better over. “My dearest love,” he began; and then he laid his head down on the table and sobbed like a child. It was so true, as true as death; sad that it should be true, sadder than death.

“My dearest love.” Never again should he have the right to say these words; never any more. He had not the right now. He pushed the chair back and stood up. He felt suffocated. There was no air; he gasped for breath. The pain in his breast was unendurable. He went to the window and flung it open, and passing the mirror caught sight of a face so grey and ghastly, so drawn and wild, that it frightened him. If she could see that haggard face, those bloodshot eyes, she would know all. “Deirdre,” he said to himself with a wild feeling that she might hear him, “Deirdre, I am never going to see you again.”

He went back to the table and began anew. “My dearest love, I must break your heart, and mine goes with it. My father murdered yours, so we must never meet again.” No, no, that would not do; it was the truth, but it was brutal. It would kill her right out. He would have murdered her. “’Tis in the family,” he said with a laugh. Then he tore up the paper and began again. He could not do it. He felt that he could tell her better. He could break it to her (God knows how), so that the blow would not fall so heavy. Why need he make her wretched two days before the time? Besides, a letter might miscarry, and bring his father to the gallows. A feeling of pity crossed his mind; it must have been hard to make that confession.

It was light now, and the early sunshine stole through the

thin white blind. The night had seemed eternal, yet Hanlon was surprised to see that it was day. He went to the window, drew up the blind, and looked out upon the morning. There was the treaty-stone and the beautiful old bridge, with the wide yellow Shannon hurrying beneath it. The grey town walls on the eastern side of the river were in shadow, only the turrets caught a side light of the misty sunshine. The sunshine, too, fell on the thin shaggy trees up Castle Street, and lighted the red gables of the houses. That picture of the misty sunshine and the morning light seemed quite unreal to Michael. 'Twas but a scene he was describing to Mrs. Bellingham as she and he paced up and down Kensington Gardens. He has described it to her, and now she is telling him again what it is like, and how she loves that view because it is seen from the windows of his home. It seemed unnatural to Michael, and very cruel that the scene should be unchanged and the sun rise so brightly after that ghastly night. He would rather have kept the darkness; yet for long he stood in the sunlight by the open window, leaning against the shutter. As well there as anywhere; his heart might as well break in the sunshine as the shade. There he was standing when his mother came in to see, as she said, how he had slept.

"Oh, ye have not been in bed at ahl!" she said reproachfully as she glanced at the bed.

"No! What should I do that for?"

He turned a wild and haggard face towards her, a face grey and livid, with starting eyes. The veins in his temples were swollen and knotted; he looked like some hunted creature at bay. But his head was aching so fiercely that he was only dimly conscious of his misery. He would not go to bed; no, he would write his letter now that he did not feel so bad; but his hand shook so that he could not hold the pen, and there was nothing to say. He could think of nothing to say.

His mother left him whilst he tried to write, and presently came back with tea and a letter, which she said must have come overnight. Hanlon took the letter. "'Tis from Deirdre,"

he said, but he did not even wish to read it. He turned it unopened in his hand, as though undecided whether to break the seal.

"It hardly seems fair to read it now," he said, laying it down on the table.

He told his mother that he had been unable to write. He would go back to London by the afternoon train. But when the afternoon came he was too ill to move; but that night, worn out with grief, he slept, and on the morrow felt more courage to meet his fate.

Until he had left the house his desire to avoid his father absorbed every other feeling, but when the parting with his mother was over and he was seated quietly in the train, he began to wish that he had not left Deirdrè so utterly unprepared for this calamity. He should at least have written to warn her that trouble was to befall them, but now how could he face her? What should he say to her loving words of welcome? How could he meet her frank and happy gaze? He knew she would come down to her door to meet him; he could see her now standing in the doorway with her happy face and outstretched hands. And he—what could he do? What could he say? Would she read his ghastly story written on his face? He tried to fancy her driving him from her presence, telling him never to let her see his face again, but it was not like nature. The only ending to that interview that seemed natural was one wherein she threw her arms about his neck and forgave him, and said she would marry him in spite of all. He wondered that he had not thought of that before, it was so simple! She would marry him all the same; and he, would he accept the sacrifice? Would he let her join her fate with his? He would tell her how shameful was his lot, but he knew that he would let her do it. "She will be happier so," he said; by which he meant—only he did not know it—that he would be happier so.

Dear soul, she would marry him all the same, but how she would grieve. Her tender conscience would never more have

rest. She would fret, and mourn, and wonder whether their marriage was not a sin. She had had grief enough already, and now he who loved her better than his own soul, was to bring her a sorrow that must darken her whole life. That haunting terror of her father's end now sleeping would wake up anew. In any case, whether she married him or not, it would ruin her whole life. Why had his father confessed? He would have done far better to keep his sins to himself. What good had the man done by making his wife and his son wretched—aye, and the girl he had already so deeply wronged? What good could come of it? Why had he not let them be ignorant and happy? "I sha'n't tell her," he said quite suddenly. He was sure she would marry him all the same, so why need her life be darkened as well as *his*? No, certainly he would not tell her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DURING his journey Hanlon had felt very sure that reticence respecting his father's crime would be not only justifiable but absolutely right. He thought the matter over a great deal, considered it in all its bearings, and could not see a single argument in favour of confession; yet when he reached London his feelings underwent a change, and by the sober light of day he did not see his duty quite so clearly. After he had reached his lodgings he passed many hours in fruitless and miserable meditation. Silence and confession seemed one as bad as the other, and at last he set off for St. David's Terrace, resolved to leave the decision to fate.

He had never gone to Mrs. Bellingham's house with so little pleasure; he would indeed have given much not to have been forced to go, but apart from the fact that he was expected, and that his absence would cause anxiety to Deirdrè, he knew that he would have no rest until he had seen her, and his fate was decided either for good or ill.

When he arrived at South Kensington the evening was already closing in. He felt thankful that the friendly twilight veiled his drawn and careworn face. But as he reached St. David's Terrace he thought no darkness could conceal the misery and agitation of his heart. He did not look up at the window as he unlatched the gate; heartsick and wretched he went up the little path, with downcast eyes, wishing that he might die rather than meet the gentle gaze of the woman he loved. Then the door opened suddenly; there was a rustling sound of swift-moving drapery, a cry of love, and joy, and welcome; and for a moment Hanlon forgot his doubts

and misery in the delight of being with Deirdrè again. Her presence and her beauty, her sweet caressing voice, and above all her kiss, wrought a spell on the unhappy man. He could not say the word that must undo her happiness, that might drive her forever from his side.

It seemed a year, she told him, since he went away; the time had seemed so long without him, and she was just as glad, she said, to have him back as if he had been gone a year. Then holding his hand in hers she said that he was cold and must come up to the fire—the first fire of autumn; and when they reached the lighted room, she saw that he was pale. Did he feel ill? she asked with tender anxiousness.

That was his chance, and Hanlon felt it was his chance, but with the innocent tempter at his side, with her soft touch mesmerising his weak will, vaguely and half unconsciously he let the moment pass. "No, it was only that the crossing had been rough and that he had not slept," and then he gave up struggling against what he called his fate, and let a dreamy delicious sense of happiness possess his soul.

The die was cast, he told himself, but his decision was not yet beyond recall. Deirdrè and he were seated side by side, and as she chafed his cold hands in her warm ones, she asked how his mother was, and his father; what he had done at Limerick, and whether he had seen Miss Kitty Dolan? His father—well, his father was never very strong, and his mother of course had many cares. Hanlon felt that his voice sounded strange, that his manner was constrained; he saw, too, that Deirdrè noted that something was amiss. He felt now that he could never tell her—he would die rather than give her pain. And yet it seemed to him that the next word she spoke must force him to confession. Then the door opened and Mademoiselle Lefevre came in, in an ecstasy of pleasure and surprise to find Monsieur already there. The kind old lady would soon have left the lovers to themselves, but the maid came in, kettle in hand, and after that there seemed no possibility of going back to the former topics. So they all chatted

and laughed together till Hanlon, with a sudden exclamation that he was half an hour late, went hurriedly away, thankful that fate had shaped his course so happily, and convinced that it would have been impossible for him to have acted otherwise.

But his difficulties were not yet over. His mother had made him promise to write to her as soon as he had seen Deirdrè. That promise he would have left unfulfilled, but that he feared lest his mother, thinking he had committed suicide, or died of a broken heart, might come to London to learn his fate. Yet he dared not tell her the truth, for who could say that she might not feel it her duty to enlighten Deirdrè? He spent an entire morning trying to compose a letter which might deceive without being a direct lie, but he could not do it. The idea of such prevarication was hateful to him; he loathed deceit, at least in theory, and the attempt to square matters with his conscience by avoiding a direct lie made him meaner and more contemptible in his own eyes. At last he gave that up; he would lie boldly. But bold lying was so distasteful to him that he seized his hat and started out to confess all to Deirdrè. Then he bethought him that it was too late: it wanted only three days to his wedding. The time for confession had gone by; he would be wrong, just for a scruple of his own, to ruin her life.

When Mrs. Hanlon got her son's letter she read it through and through again in silent bewilderment. Her husband looked at her with mournful eyes, but did not ask what was Michael's news. He dreaded to hear of the sorrow of his injured son.

"She is gown' to ma'ry 'um," said Mrs. Hanlon, at last. She spoke in an awestruck voice.

"The Lord be praised that I have not ruined my son's life," said the old man.

Mrs. Hanlon turned away her face; for a minute she did not speak, then she said quietly, "It seems to me very unnatural."

"So it is unnatural," assented Dan, sighing and rubbing his face with his long feeble hands. "Ye're right, it is unnatural. But then the whole thing is against nature. 'Tis against nature that ye go on livin' with me and carin' for me. That seems to me much more unnatural. I would be less wretched, Marey, av ye went away, even av ye reproached me. I'd not be feelin' so terribly guilty."

"'Tis a part of yourself that I am, Dan," said Mrs. Hanlon, going on with her sewing. "What shames you shames me too."

"'Tis for that and for the children that I do not aise me moind," said Hanlon, mournfully.

"Aise yer moind!" cried Mary, rising and coming towards him; "what are ye maning by that? How in the world could ye aise yer moind, Daniel?" She was trembling with fear.

"I would wish, Marey—I have wished at times since, manny years, to take the punishment av me sin."

His wife looked at him in blank dismay. She could not speak—her soul was filled with a great dread.

"That should be the only atonement I could make," said the man apologetically, his nervous hands busy with his coat buttons.

"Atonement!" cried Mrs. Hanlon. "That an atonement—an atonement to disgrace yer children—an atonement to make their name a byeword, a reproach and—hers too? She bears yer name by this time. She is your daughter now as much as Dineen's. Swear to me, Dan, ye'll never do that."

"'Tis no use to take an oath, Marey. I'll not do ut—for her sake, and for yours and the children's. It is not always that I even wish ut. I'm often feelin' I have not the stren'th for ut—not the stren'th a' will, I mean—not the corrage," he added, rubbing his face again with his hands.

"'Tis a much better sort a' corrage to bear ut in silence," said Mary, resolutely.

"I queshun that," said the old man quietly. "'Tis more

expedient, no doubt; but when ye come to a queshun of right—ah well! I have had little to say to right," he sighed again. "Poor Marey," he added with a melancholy smile.

"It makes me mad to hear ye talk like that, Dan," cried his wife impatiently. "I'm not denyin' that yer sin is the greatest a man can do, but ye have repented and ye are forgiven. Ye are not a bad man, Dan, for ahl ye have had wun turr'ble fall. There is manny and manny a worse man who has never done a crime. I think ye're a very good man," she added abruptly; "but 'twill be a fearful sin av ye—ye confess, Dan."

"Ye need have no fear, Marey. I'd not have the stren'th, av a cohnstable was to come into the shop at this moment I'd not have the stren'th."

"Don't talk of such dreadful things," cried Mary. "I'll be afraid to be lettin' ye go out a' me sight. Dan, 'tis forgotten on earth and forgiven in heaven; let it not be so much as named among us. See there, I've burned Mick's letter, and we'll never speak of ut again."

But Hanlon, now that he had once unburdened his mind to his wife, was unable to go back to his former reticence. He could not speak to her of his sin, for she refused to hear him; but from the allusions he made to it she could see that it was always upmost in his mind; and looking back on many things, she wondered that she had not guessed what was the sorrow that so relentlessly bore him down.

Strangely enough, his confession had added to Hanlon's sense of sin; his crime weighed on his mind more heavily than of old. He envied criminals who were found out and relieved of their burdensome lives. He often asked himself why he had not given himself up at the time; people would have ceased to remember it against the children ere now. He knew that it was unreasonable of him to expect Deirdrè to write and tell him he was forgiven by her; he had no right to expect that she would pardon him that awful

wrong. Still she had married his son, and perhaps she might write to the penitent sinner; but she made no sign, and he dared not ask her pardon, so sure was he that it would be refused. Had he confessed, had he of his own free will given his life in atonement for the one he had taken, then he might ask forgiveness of her and of his God. His God, indeed, knew how bitter was his repentance, how unceasing his remorse; but she, she must think lightly of a penitence that brought forth no fruit. Old Dan thought lightly of it himself. He wished he had taken the consequences of his crime years ago; he wished that his shame and disgrace were passed; but as he sat there in his little shop, poor, but accounted an honourable man, he knew that it was not merely his duty to his children that kept him silent—he could not face that fearful shame. Wretched as he was in his false position, his life was better than the disgrace and ignominy of a murderer's death. He had no fear of his wife; he knew that she would never betray him; but he could not meet her eyes, he could not look her in the face, though he had a contempt for himself when he remembered that it was her knowledge of his crime, and not the crime itself, that made him so ashamed. He slunk about the house in a hangdog way; he trembled when his wife spoke to him; he avoided her society, and rejected the sympathy which she, woman like, held out to him. He spent his days seated by the hearth, with his head in his hands, and his heart consumed with despair, while Mary did the housework and the shop work, and spent her spare moments in fine needlework, which she did for sale. Probably her heart was not a great deal lighter than her husband's, but she had less time to brood over her misery.

She answered Michael's letter shortly. He must, she said, choose his own life, and she supposed she must be very thankful that his wife could still love him. He was very fortunate to have inspired such great love, and he must remember that nothing he could ever do, no devotion of his, could repay it. She need hardly say how gladly she would comply

with his wish never to mention the past. Hanlon did not show that letter to Deirdrè, who was a little hurt that Michael's parents so completely ignored her existence.

The "boys," and Mary and Anna, had all written to her, and young Dan came over from Cloughdundrum to be present at his brother's wedding. Michael brought him to Deirdrè's lodgings with as much pride as though he had been the most fashionable and aristocratic person in the world. And was he not dear Michael's brother? Deirdrè welcomed him as a brother, and called him Dan, and made him call her Deirdrè. She thought him a little like Michael, and told him so, with a sweet blush and an air of making him a very fine compliment. She assumed a confiding sisterly attitude towards him at once.

It would be hard to say which of the two brothers was the most charmed by her on this occasion. She, for her part, was mightily pleased with Dan, he was so kind and brotherly, so simple and serious. She did not in the least object to his brogue, and she did not even know that his clothes were shabby and ill-cut; he seemed to her a most delightful brother-in-law. Perhaps Miss Brophy would not have been pleased to know what Mr. Daniel thought of Mick's *fiancée*. They were sitting in the drawing-room, as happy a party as could be, Deirdrè chatting with Dan, and Michael bungling contentedly in what he chose to consider the French language with old Mademoiselle, when Miss Butler entered and put all harmony to flight.

She patronised the whole party, praised Michael's French, and wished *she* could speak as fluently; she complimented Mademoiselle on her pretty new dress, which she had seen a dozen times, and which, as she knew, was "grafted" at the elbows; she congratulated Deirdrè on her charming brother-in-law, and graciously inquired of Dan whether London did not seem very big after Cloughdundrum, and what he thought of the Tower and the Monument, and whether he had felt very ill while crossing the Channel? She made them all feel

very sheepish and conscious of social inferiority. Then, when she had reduced everyone to a state of depression—not to say ill-temper—she departed with the same polite insolence of manner as she had displayed throughout her visit. She perceived that she left the little company ruffled and ill at ease, and she was pleased at having done so, for she could not yet forgive Michael for loving another woman.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHEN Miss Butler reached home she felt rather ashamed of her ill-humour, and in the consoling presence of Captain Campbell wondered how she had ever preferred the absent Michael. She was, indeed, sufficiently penitent to resolve that on the wedding morning she would be gracious to everyone, and more especially to Daniel Hanlon, whose peace of mind, she imagined, must have suffered by the bewildering combination of disdain and charm which she had exhibited to his astonished and provincial eyes.

The ceremony was to take place at nine o'clock, and after it the wedding party were to breakfast at the Butlers' house. Butler grumbled at the unseasonableness of the hour, but Deirdre considered that so late an hour as nine was a magnificent concession to the luxurious habits of the Butler family, and for all his sighs James Butler would not for the world have allowed anyone but himself to give the bride away.

Mrs. Butler said, with tears in her eyes, that the occasion would remind her too painfully of poor dear Arthur Bellingham, so she would not go to the church; but Rose and the little girls made a supreme effort to get up early, and at half-past eight Captain Campbell called for them, and they all went to the church together. The young Hanlons were already there. Rose noticed that Michael's face was as white as a sheet, and that his hand trembled. There were dark lines round his eyes and mouth, and his drawn, careworn look made his overacted cheerfulness positively ghastly. He was nearer confession than ever he had been before; his conscience smote him hard, and for the first time he realised that there

was something tainted and unnatural in this marriage. All night he had not slept; for many hours he had paced up and down his room, striving to stifle the voice within him that made him hate himself. That he should do this—that he should deceive the woman who had given up so much for him—good God! it was villainous. He was dishonoured now as much by his own deceit as by his father's sin! If it were possible, he thought, to tell all without betraying his father, he would confess even now. He fumed, wandered aimlessly about, and felt supremely wretched, yet his heart told him that he was glad the time for confession had gone by. This wretchedness of his, this conscience-stricken misery, saved him in his own eyes from utter gracelessness; and yet his remorse was in a way sincere, and as he shook hands with Rose Butler, he felt intensely miserable and guilty. When he was married he would feel better; there would then be no possibility of repentance. The truth would have to be hidden from his wife; there would then be no doubt as to his duty.

Just then Deirdre came into the church, leaning on James Butler's arm. Her sweet face was pale and grave, as though a faint shadow of past grief chastened the brightness of her love and happiness.

"How *pale* she is," whispered Rose to the Captain.

Campbell nodded. "But, my word, how beautiful! I don't wonder that Hanlon rather funks marrying a—a—a creature like that. She don't look a bit like a woman, does she?"

"Like an angel in a blue serge yachting dress," suggested Rose.

Campbell looked at her with a mingling of admiration and reproach. "Some fellows," he whispered, "have a good deal of cheek. I can't believe, however, they feel—at ease, you know, and that sort of thing."

"Perhaps they don't admire her as much as you do," retorted Miss Butler. "Very few men do. She is quite a

woman's beauty. Of course *I* think her lovely. If *I* were like that I shouldn't care *what* people thought of me, but I know *heaps* of men don't even think her good-looking."

With these words Miss Butler buried her face devoutly in her muff; and having thus entrenched herself against the secular interruptions of her lover, she gave herself over to wondering how any man could be so lost to all self-respect as to be married in a blue frock-coat and red tie, and to the contemplation of the back of Dan's jacket, which had a curious way of settling down at the neck, and seemed to have been cut on the supposition that his back sloped outwards at the waist. "Brother and all," said Miss Butler to herself, "I would change places with Mrs. Bellingham. No, Mrs. Michael Hanlon."

That change lifted the load off Michael's mind. There was no more question of right or wrong. What was done could not be undone, and that truism afforded him infinite satisfaction.

Miss Butler concluded that he must have been terribly nervous, he looked so much happier when he left the church, and when he arrived at Cornwall Terrace he was in wildly high spirits.

It needed some one to be in high spirits, for a more uncongenial party never sat down together, even to a wedding breakfast. Butler, for all his good resolutions, found it difficult to be cordial to these people—to the young Hanlons, with whom he felt it an immense condescension to break bread; to the priest, whose order he disliked as only ex-Catholics dislike the clergy; to old Mademoiselle Lefevre, whose French and English were alike unintelligible to him.

Mrs. Butler, always kind, was in her most plaintive mood. She thought the morning air most unwholesome, and was sure that it was very bad for poor Deirdrè to have been out so early, and was quite shocked when she heard that the poor girl had not yet had so much as a cup of tea. It was no wonder that she looked pale and thin. Her motherly pity being

roused by the shambling figure and long gaunt face of Dan Hanlon, she made tender inquiries of him respecting his health, and was so grieved by his want of appetite that at the end of five minutes she called him "my dear."

Dan Hanlon was seldom an exhilarating companion, but on this day he was more taciturn than usual. Mrs. Butler's gentle interest and the friendly advances of Kate and Emily were extremely painful to him; they clashed with all his theories of landlord iniquity, and made these people human and lovable. His views were much more advanced than his brother's, his feeling with regard to the Ballymoneyboy eviction far keener. Secretly he thought hanging too good for James Butler, yet he was forced to own that the private life of the miscreant did not seem unlovely. Dan thought no worse of Mr. Butler for his distant manner towards himself, and was forced to admire his behaviour towards Mademoiselle Lefevre. He was so kind and deferential to the old lady, so full of sympathy for her grief at parting from her beloved Madame Beling'am, that neither Dan nor anyone else could have guessed how unutterably she bored James Butler, or how relieved he was when, some few minutes after Captain Campbell and Dan Hanlon had started out to see the last of the bride and bridegroom, she took her departure.

"Ah! ha!" he exclaimed, with a sigh of contentment, as he went back to his smoking-room, "that dismal ceremony's over at last. That's a blessing, and I suppose that the next time Miss Deirdrè gets married Alex will be in a position to give her away." He and Rose were now alone in the smoking-room. "It's rather stiff work for a pseudo-father when a young lady takes it into her head to be married about once every twelve months. And I suppose," he added, slipping his arm round his daughter's waist, "that I shall have soon to go through it all over again for you. Well, I would rather give away fifty pseudo-daughters than one real one."

"Dear old father!" cried Rose, throwing her arms round

his neck; "I don't want to go away from you. I'm sure, don't you know, that when the time comes I shall cry off. It will be like the young lady, you know, in 'Jock o' Hazeldean'—

"Both priest and bridegroom wait the bride,
But ne'er a bride was there,"

only in my case *you'll* be Jock o' Hazeldean. When I saw Michael Hanlon looking so ghastly white this morning, it made me feel awful. I *did* feel rather glad," she added, more to herself than to her father, "that I was not in Deirdre's shoes."

"I should think so, indeed; what a connection! Well, well, you women are queer creatures; the best of you can't get on without the men. To think of any girl who had been Mrs. Bellingham giving up a good position and a good income to become Mrs. Hanlon!"

"The brother is really *too* Irish," said Rose, laughing. "Be jabers! thim brogue is moigthy sthrong. Coat, too, such a stylish make and cut! I must get Alex to ask him who is his tailor; he'd never see any joke in it at all; it would be such fun. Can't you fancy it, papa?"

"I can't fancy Alex making fun of any man's poverty."

"Dear old Alex—no; he's much too tender-hearted. He's a deal too good for me altogether. Don't you wonder, papa, *what* he sees in me to have gone dangleing on all these years? I'm sure if he had been half as snubby to me as I have to him I should have taken up with someone else ages ago."

Butler pinched his daughter's ear.

"I suspect, miss, that if he had had the sense to be more snubby, as you call it, you would have been a great deal less snubby."

"Well, there may be something in that," said Rose, thoughtfully. She was wondering how much Hanlon's indifference had to do with her preference for him. She stood looking absently out of the window with an expression of face which was, for her, very serious, till the sight of Captain

Campbell coming up the steps recalled her to herself and her usual vivacity. She ran out in the hall to meet him.

"Well, did you see them safely off? Were they happy and comfortable? Have you put Daniel into the lion's den? I should think the *real* Daniel, don't you know, must have had hair like that, and the lions were afraid of it; small blame to them, poor creatures. I was just saying to papa that I *hope* you remembered to ask him *who* made his coat, and *when*, and *where*? It sounds like the game the children play, doesn't it?"

Campbell laughed; he would have laughed at any speech of Miss Butler's. Her words all bore for him the hall-mark of wit and humour.

"He seems a very decent sort of fellow," he said, as he went with his *fiancée* into the smoking-room.

"Well, did you see them off?" asked Butler, who had risen and was on the point of leaving the lovers alone.

Alex said yes, he had left them very happy in a compartment to themselves, with "reserved" stuck across the window. "I call that most awfully considerate on the part of the company," he added when Butler had left the room. "They always used to put 'engaged,' which must have been so trying."

"Not nearly so trying as hearing old jokes about it," said Miss Rose, pertly. "I see now why you admire the Cloughdrum editor so much. He laughed, I suppose, at your witticisms, which may be new to him and useful for his newspaper. But to tell you the truth, the plain unvarnished truth, you are not good—no, Alex, my poor, poor Alex, you are—not—good—at—jokes." Miss Butler delivered this speech with immense seriousness, and with a grave little nod of her head between each word. Then assuming a more eager manner, she stretched out her hands and went on quickly, "Hand 'em all over to me, and I'll improve 'em and furbish them up for you, and then you can fire them all off at the club; but not at me, please, not at me; for, Alex, I can't enjoy

a joke unless it be new or good, or," she added mysteriously, "one of my own."

"I didn't mean to make a joke, Rose," said the Captain apologetically, and then drawing nearer to the girl he continued sentimentally, "I was thinking, love, how soon *we* shall be in a reserved compartment, and——"

Rose gave a cry of mock dismay, and then burst out laughing. "Alex! Alex! the sentiment is worse than the wit. My dear friend, you must avoid sentiment. Now, don't be cross, Alex. Oh! it's no use saying that you are not cross, because you know you *are*. So should I be in your place, *horribly* cross. Ah, Alex! when you get me in that reserved compartment that we speak of, you will *soon* see how cross I *can* be. Misguided man! fancy looking forward to that journey with pleasure—pleasure! Dismiss forthwith all thoughts of pleasure from your mind. My dear Alex, it will be horrible, simply horrible. Fancy being penned up for thirty-six hours in a little box no bigger than this sofa. Ugh! ugh! ugh!" and Miss Butler hid her face in the cushions.

"Then, darling, why should we go? I'm sure I don't care where I am, so long, dear, as I have you. I thought we were going to Italy to please you."

"Then, my dear, you never made a greater mistake in your life," said Miss Butler, lifting up her pretty merry face.

"Then why on earth are we going?" asked the bewildered Captain.

"I will tell you a little story," said Miss Rose, seriously. "Sit still and don't interrupt. There was once a great prophet, and there was also in those days a mountain. 'Come hither, mountain,' said the prophet, beckoning with his hand, but the moun——"

"Oh," cried Campbell, laughing. "Bless my soul! you are a queer girl, Rose."

"That is a very doubtful compliment," sighed Rose.

Then Campbell burst into one of those rhapsodies in which, to say the truth, he was neither very eloquent nor original; but Miss Rose, thinking that she had plagued him enough for one interview, unbent and was irresistibly endearing. How charming, sweet, and loving this young lady could be when she chose, any of her most intimate friends will tell you, though even they could evoke this softer spirit but rarely, and on occasions when for some reason or other Miss Butler was deeply moved.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ONLY a few days before their wedding had the Hanlons decided where they would pass their honeymoon. When the subject was first discussed, Deirdrè had laid a veto upon Ireland, and the expense of a long journey had made them give up all thoughts of foreign travel. Then they had weighed the merits of various places on the southern coast. The reasons which had induced them to choose Lyme were of the slightest: they had heard that it was pretty, quiet, and not too expensive, and a friend of Michael's knew of comfortable rooms facing the sea. It was, therefore, the more fortunate that Lyme Regis turned out to be the most beautiful place in the world. "How can you wish to go to Italy," wrote Mrs. Michael to Miss Butler, "when you might come here? There can be no doubt that this is the most beautiful place in the world."

But it was not only in the choice of place that the Hanlons were so lucky; they were exceptionally favoured in the season, which was just what one would wish. The days were for the most part bright and sunny, and in the whole month there were only five unceasingly rainy days, for generally it was fine in the afternoon if the morning were wet, or if it rained in the evening, there had usually been time for a walk before the weather broke up.

On the wet days the young people returned unceasing thanks to Hobson, through whose recommendation they had discovered these charming rooms. From the windows there was a view of the coast and sea, which was even grander in wet weather than fine; on stormy days it was sublime. But Deirdrè liked

the view best on moonlight nights, when the silver rays fell on the sea like an unsheathed sword. On such evenings they walked out together on the Cobbe, speaking little, but intensely happy. Yes, even Michael was intensely happy.

The month slipped by like a long, delightful dream. The days when they had not been married seemed so distant and forgotten that all of life that had been worth living was comprised in that time at Lyme; yet when the day came when they must go back to work and London, they looked sadly into each others' eyes, and cried, "So soon?" Not till then had they realised that this holiday must have an end.

They were very sorry to leave the country and the long, hilly walks, and the bright hedgerows; indeed, as they drove to Axminster, Deirdre shed a few regretful tears. This happiness was so new to her that she could not understand that she was taking with her the sunshine and the light, and that it was only damp autumn mists and leafless trees that she was leaving behind.

But when the train reached Clapham Junction she found that she was extremely fond of London, and that the thought of beginning their working life together was sweet. By the time they reached Torrington Square, where they had lodgings, she had almost ceased to grieve for Dorsetshire.

When Hanlon remembered her former home and her well-to-do widowhood, he owned to himself that she had made a poor exchange, and that the "drawing-room floor" in the dingy square needed much love to make it bright.

So, too, thought Rose Butler when, a few days after the Hanlons returned to town, she made the long pilgrimage to Bloomsbury. Her own life was little changed since she first knew Deirdre, and had made that wedding call on Mrs. Belingham. Two years and a half! Two centuries to Deirdre, but to Rose the years had been short, and it seemed to her that it was but yesterday that she had driven to the red house at Kensington. She could remember each flower in the window-boxes, and how the fragrant lilacs were blooming at

the gate; nor could she forget how often she had gone to the Bellinghams' house in the hope of meeting Michael Hanlon. Then her cab stopped in front of one of the dreariest houses in Torrington Square, and as she alighted she thanked her stars that she had not become Mrs. Michael Hanlon. She had quite persuaded herself by this time that nothing but the hauteur of her manner had restrained the young man from offering her that name.

A girl in a dirty whitish cotton gown, and with a smutty face, opened the door, and led the way up the shabby, not over-clean staircase to the sitting-room. There was no one in it, and as Rose took in the details of its sordid commonplaceness she thought again of the drawing-room in Melbury Road, and again said to herself she was glad she had not accepted Michael. There was a round table in the centre of the room, a pembroke in the corner, almost covered now with newspapers and books. There was a wicker table near the fireplace; on the upper story was a piece of work, and the lower tiers were piled with silks and work-bags. That table was, Miss Butler concluded, the Hanlons' property. On the white marble mantelshelf was a black marble clock, surmounted by a bronze hunter attacked by a wild boar. The other ornaments were faience vases and small glass jars filled with chrysanthemums. There was no difficulty in deciding to whom the various objects in the room belonged. It was the carpet that affected Miss Butler the most painfully—a terrible new carpet of red and yellow flowers; and the hearthrug represented a Newfoundland dog, framed in brown and red roses, all on a bluish-white ground. A real cat was sleeping on the nose of her pictured foe.

Rose took in all these details at a glance. She noticed, too, that a soft olive-toned curtain of the most orthodox shade covered the folding doors, and that etchings of unquestionable culture hung side by side with "Dignity and Impudence," and "The Coronation of the Queen," on the white wall-paper; and she was just wondering whether the lodging-

house vulgarity or the stereotyped culture of the Hanlon's belongings were less like the warmth and glow and originality of Bellingham's house, when the door handle rattled with an impetuosity which betrayed the touch of Hanlon, and he and Deirdrè came in at the same time.

They had been out—were not in the house, indeed, when Rose came. They were so glad they had not missed her, so pleased to see her; their greeting was so unaffected and genial that Miss Butler speedily forgot the carpet and the Newfoundland dog. She must take off her bonnet and cloak, must come up to Deirdrè's room and see what a gloomy little den the study was. Deirdrè showed her limited quarters with quite as much simplicity and pleasure as she had shown her earlier home. When Rose came back to the sitting-room there were tea-things on the wicker table, and Mr. Hanlon was in the very act of making the tea.

Hanlon stayed and had tea with the two young women, the cat meanwhile settling down on his knee and displaying an eagerness and curiosity with regard to his teacup that many persons might have thought officious. It was a very pretty cat, a Persian, a wedding present to Hanlon from Pamphlet, who had taken that opportunity of making peace with the fiery young novelist.

After tea, Hanlon and the cat went to the post; and Miss Butler entered into more minute details of her wedding preparations, of Alex's good qualities, and the order in which she meant to keep him. She would make him give up his club, and his billiards, and his cigars.

"Rose," said Deirdrè, gravely, "Don't. I would not say this to anyone but you, nor to you if you were not just going to marry. But, Rose, dearest, I was not—I did not keep Arthur's love; I did not make him happy."

"Darling!" cried Miss Butler, embracing her, "I'm sure you did."

"No," said Deirdrè, shaking her head, "no, I did not. He was good, and I—I really did mean to do right; but—

oh ! he tried to make me go his way, and I, I tried to make him go mine. It was a fatal error."

"Then you were not happy?" said Rose, sadly.

"Neither was he," cried Deirdrè, with her eyes full of tears. "I was hard, Rose, I was unjust; I wished him to resign things that were not wrong. I was unreasonable, and when he would not give in I felt wronged. I would not have Michael know I hate smoking for the world. I would not have him give up a single innocent thing. And he, he thinks the same. He does not try to rule me."

The return of Hanlon interrupted the women's confidences at this point; and soon afterwards Captain Campbell dropped in, and took Rose away with him. As they drove home Miss Butler told her lover of the confidence Deirdrè had made her. "So after all, Alex, I think, don't you know, that I shall let you smoke; and you must undertake not to remonstrate if I dance all the evening with one man."

"I can't believe these little things make any difference," said Campbell, sententiously. "I would gladly give in to any wish of yours, dearest—any reasonable wish; and I am sure you know that I should not ask of you any unreasonable sacrifice." (Rose knew then that she would not be allowed to dance with anyone unduly.) "When people give each other their whole lives, it can't much matter whether they give up their cigars and their dances."

"Perhaps you had better give up your cigars before you make so sure of that," said Rose.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CAPTAIN CAMPBELL was disposed to resent the idea that two people who really loved one another could find the slightest difficulty in living happily together—could have to submit to a great deal of give and take. Had he known that Michael's habit of coming in without wiping his muddy boots ceased on the twentieth repetition of the offence to be the most charming misdemeanour in the world; had he known how much hypocrisy there was in Hanlon's preference for dry toast and tea without milk over any other breakfast in the world on fast-days; how twenty times a day these two people said or did things that the other would rather they had not said or done, he would have refused to believe in their love and happiness.

But though Michael smoked a great deal, and made the rooms and his clothes smell odiously of tobacco; though he sat down to dinner in his morning jacket and muddy boots; though he invariably lost his pen or his envelopes or wanted his chapters fastening together just when Deirdre was most deeply interested in her book or her sewing; though he had a tiresome habit of putting things into his pocket and then—always with his wife's assistance—ransacking both the sitting-room and his dressing-room for them; and though he was always extremely ill-used, not to say cross, while these hunts were in progress; though, in short, he was as aggravating as the generality of husbands who spend their days at home, Deirdre was infinitely happier with him in those dingy Bloomsbury lodgings than ever she had been in her life before; happier even than she had been at Lyme Regis.

As for Hanlon, his love and tenderness for his wife in-

creased every day, and with it was mingled a feeling of compunction for the wrong he had done her. He gave in to all her whims and wishes so easily that she never felt that he was giving in. He fasted with monastic rigour on fast-days, went to church three times on Sunday, and made various other little changes in his way of life without letting her perceive that they were changes.

When Rose was married and gone to Italy, Deirdrè felt that the last of the old ties was broken, that she belonged entirely now to her husband's world. The intimacy with the Butlers was a past thing that could never come back again—for not only did Hanlon and the Butlers utterly disagree on almost all important subjects, but Deirdrè could not help seeing that they considered her Michael—her piece of peerless perfection—an inferior. She did not resent this, not at all, for it is only truth that is bitter; but she could not feel much sympathy with people who were so dead to beauty of soul and to charm of manner. Moreover, she was not sure that the Butlers wished to be intimate with her. She could not consult Michael on this delicate subject; but though he always spoke kindly of her old friends she felt that he was aware of the gulf between them, and that unconsciously he resented it.

Hanlon had a fairly large acquaintance among authors and journalists, and the ladies of the literary colony in Bloomsbury hastened to call on young Hanlon's wife, whose youth, and sweet looks, and gentle manners gained for her much goodwill. Indeed, by Christmas time she had so many kind friends that, had she wished it, she need never have spent a solitary evening. But among the kindest of Deirdrè's new friends was a large stout lady with black eyes and a coffee-coloured skin—a lady gorgeously apparelled, and who came all the way from South Kensington to call on Mrs. 'Anlon. "'I must go and see 'Anlon's wife,' I said to my 'usband this mornin'." 'I must see the sort of gurl 'Anlon's married.' And I'm sure, my dear, it's worth a day's journey to see such a sweet face as yours is. I shall tell 'Anlon wot I think of his luck."

Deirdrè was quite overcome by the good lady's flowery speeches.

"Who is this Mrs. Thirloe, Mick?" she asked when her husband came in. "She says she has known you for years and years. I've never heard you speak of her."

"Oh yes you have, often; you have seen her, too, for that matter," said Hanlon, smiling and turning rather red.

"Indeed; I think not."

"Her maiden name—her maiden name," said Hanlon with some confusion, "was—er—was Snookini."

Deirdrè gave a cry of amusement and delight. "You dear old thing," she cried, "you need not turn so red; indeed, Michael, I am not jealous."

"Jealous! I should think not. You can't believe, love, that—she—that I ever cared for her?"

Deirdrè maintained a provoking silence. It pleased her to think her husband had cared for Mrs. Thirloe. "I used to wonder, Michael," she said after a time, "how ever you came to care for me; now I don't wonder any more—you are so easily pleased."

But soon she ceased to tease him about the Snookini, who was in truth a kind friend to the young people, and would have been still kinder would they have allowed it.

When the spring came it brought with it a new hope that gave a new interest to life and a deeper meaning to the word "home," and both husband and wife felt that they would like a house of their own in which they could live year after year; a home that might be a tender memory to their child, such as the Ross Farm had been to Michael, such as no place in the world had ever been to Deirdrè.

It was certainly an uncommon stroke of luck that there chanced to be a small house vacant in Keppel Street. The young people took it, and plunged heart and soul into the interesting work of furnishing. Tables and chairs, curtains and carpets, had hitherto been matters of supreme indifference to Deirdrè. "The wayfarer gives little heed to the

embellishments of the roadside inn, and so the human soul ;"—in theory we all know the conclusion. But somehow this house in Keppel Street seemed less of roadside inn than any former home had done, and its arrangements assumed to the eyes of its mistress an importance that she could not have defended by any theory of life. The pattern of the stair-carpet, the question of matting or oilcloth, became matters of vital importance, and she and Michael discussed the merits of blue or yellow cretonne for the drawing-room curtains with a zest that produced the nearest approach to a "difference" there had ever been between them. The experiment of washing a sample of the rival colours restored peace, and secured a brilliant victory to Deirdre, whose judgment was thenceforward undisputed.

While she was busy with her upholstery, the Campbells returned from Italy, and settled in Bolton Street. So soon as they were installed, Mrs. Michael Hanlon made her first call upon her friend. "It is a very nice little house, Michael," the lady informed her husband, who was at that moment nailing blue plates of doubtful origin on to the drawing-room wall, "it is a very nice little house, but it is not *nearly* so pretty as ours."

Mrs. Campbell had been delighted to see her friend, and had talked in one long sentence for the whole two hours of Deirdre's visit. She should drive over to Keppel Street almost every day, she said ; Deirdre would be bored to death, and would give orders to the man that when Mrs. Campbell called she was not at home. Alex would be *wild* at having missed her ; she really must not go till Alex came in. Must she really ? Then she and Mr. Hanlon must fix an evening to come and dine with them ; Alex always said that Mr. Hanlon was the cleverest fellow in the world. Deirdre observed that Mrs. Campbell's opinion of Alex was much more complimentary than Miss Butler's had been.

But the daily visits never took place, and Mrs. Hanlon never had the difficult task of telling her non-existent "man"

that she was not at home to Mrs. Campbell. Three weeks passed by before that lady found time to return her friend's call, and when she did arrive in Keppel Street she was in her most perverse humour. The coachman had had great difficulty in finding his way; all that Whitechapel district was so complicated, though Bloomsbury was *very* nice when once you got there, and this little morning-room was charming, quite charming. Would not Deirdrè show her the drawing-room?"

"This is the drawing-room," answered Mrs. Hanlon; "we furnished it with cretonne because it is inexpensive; at least, it is inexpensive compared with other things."

Mrs. Campbell felt a twinge of remorse for her ill-nature. There was nothing she adored so much as cretonne; if she had had *her* way they would have had nothing else in their house, though as for its being inexpensive! What had made her think this was the morning-room was that the house had such a *very* palatial aspect from the outside, and the staircase was so good; she wished they had such a staircase. In fact, before she left, Mrs. Campbell found herself asserting that if she had been consulted, Bloomsbury was of all neighbourhoods the one she would have chosen. Then she fixed an evening for the Hanlons to dine with them, and a little later on they dined with the Hanlons.

But the old intimacy did not revive. When the friends met it was with cordiality and pleasure, but they did not see each other every day; or even every week; each had her own affairs and her own interests. Rose Campbell, the bride, had as many social duties as Deirdrè Bellingham had had three years ago; her days were filled with a round of luncheons, concerts, afternoons, drives, dinners, operas, and dances, that left her barely time enough to buy her bonnets and fit on her dresses. Mrs. Hanlon, remembering her own former life, knew why her friend came to see her so seldom. And she, too, had her days well filled. She had her early mass and her house-

keeping, and when that was done she always read the *Star*, beginning with Michael's leader—that she read twice, for it was always worth careful study; then she skimmed the debate, the Irish news, and the summary, so that when Michael came down to his late breakfast she might have something of interest to talk about. After Mr. Michael appeared his wife never had a minute to call her own. He wanted her to go for a walk with him; then when he wished to work “someone” had always hidden his books, his papers, even his inkstand. When Deirdrè visited her district she knew that on her return she would hear of fifty things that had gone wrong in her absence, and she often wondered how Michael had ever existed without a wife, he seemed so little able to take care of himself.

Altogether her days were full and short, and marvellously happy. It seemed impossible that it was she who had been the sad little child at Ballymoneyboy, the morbid, haunted girl, the unhappy wife and remorseful widow. Was that sad creature the true Deirdrè? She had little in common with the loving, happy woman to whom life was without terror, and the thought of death too distant to be feared. Sometimes as she sat at her sewing, Deirdrè, remembering her sad past, would try to recall the thoughts that used to be so dreadful to her, but now they had neither interest nor fear. The old horrors seemed as childish as a nursery tale; but when she remembered what she was now and what she once had been she sometimes asked her heart, “Can this endure—can life be filled with such great happiness?”

One bright June morning the answer came; without presentiment or warning she learned that she, at least, was born to sorrow. The day began like all her other days. She went to mass, and came home glowing and fresh from the cool morning air. Then, as her custom was, she went to her kitchen, and afterwards sat down to read the *Star*. Michael's leader was more than usually fine: she read it twice, and

then, with the paper in her lap, she paused, thinking over the leader and its subtle beauties. Her dreamy gaze was fixed on the newspaper; at last, with a start, she perceived that she was looking at her own name—"Hanlon." Then she saw "Dineen at Ballymoneyboy." With a cry of terror she sprang to her feet; her heart stopped beating, and after a moment of unbearable dismay she fell senseless on the floor.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE winter and spring that had been so happy to Michael and Deirdrè had been a wretched time to the elder Hanlons. Dan spent most of his time cowering over the fire, with his elbows on his knees and his face hidden in his hands. His wife often urged him to go into the shop—the occupation would be good for him, and she had so much else to do ; but her persuasions failed. He could not face customers ; he had “ not the corrage—not the stren’th a’ mind.” He told his wife this quite candidly, and thus threw himself, as it were, upon her mercy. Experience had taught him that this was an unfailing appeal.

It never occurred to him that he was selfish or that his life was idle, still less that it was self-indulgent. He was plunged in an abyss of misery and remorse—remorse not only for his sin but for his confession to his wife. For that winter of shame had aged Mary more than years of anxiety, and poverty, and toil. The lines in her face were grown deep as furrows ; the freshness was gone from her sweet, full-toned voice. It made Dan miserable to see her sad old face, and to feel that he was the cause of its being old and sorrowful. Yet he made no response to his wife’s efforts to rouse him from his gloom. If she came in from the shop with a bit of cheering gossip or a joke that she had heard, he would listen wearily and sigh, and say, “ Ah, well, well, Marey, dear, ’tis little that I have got to say to such-like things,” and Mary would pour forth the love and sympathy on which he made such large demands.

Sometimes she would bring in the ledger, with some difficulty that Dan must help her to overcome. But Dan would

not so much as look at the complication; merely saying, "Ah well, Marey, 'tis but a mattur of a few shilluns. Av the loss is on our side 'tis nowun's affair—nowun's affair but our own."

"'Tis the boys' affair, too, Dan," Mary would cry hotly.

Then Dan, fumbling feebly at his buttons, would answer sadly, but without any resentment, "There's smahl need, Marey, to remoid me that I'm ateing me sons' bread."

There was no rousing him. The spring sunshine cheered him as little as the winter's rain. He rarely left the house, never unless his wife invented some message that must be sent, and which no one but he could carry.

One bright June day she came into the parlour with a sunshade in her hand. "Mrs. Clerke has been leavin' her sunshade, Dan," she said. "'Tis a new one. Sure 'tis unasy she'll be about it."

"'Tis no great mattur," said Dan; "we will be sendin' it back this evenin'." But a few minutes later he came into the shop with his hat on and the sunshade in his hand.

"I'll be takin' this thing home, Marey," he said, and as he went out he nodded to her and smiled quite cheerfully.

Mrs. Hanlon was sitting at her sewing in the shop. Dan's manner made her happier than she had felt for months. If only Mick's wife would write a word of forgiveness! But she dared not ask for the pardon lest it should be denied. After a time she began to get rather uneasy; Dan did not return—he had had time by now to go to Mrs. Clerke's twice over. Then a man's figure darkened the doorway, and lifting her eyes from her work she saw—not her husband, but the police inspector.

She rose from her seat, with a smile on her livid face. "Good afternoon, sir," she said. Her voice startled her, it was so little like her own. "'Tis glor'yous weather," she added, and took up her pen as if to write an order. The pen shivered up and down the ledger. She was sure the inspector observed her unsteady hand.

"I'm not come to give an order, Mrs. Hanlon," said the

man. "Can I speak with you a minute in some more private place?"

Mary led the way into the parlour. "My husband is unfortunately out," she said politely.

The constable, remembering the suddenly blanched face and the shaking hands, looked at her in wonder and admiration. "It is about your husband that I am come, Mrs. Hanlon. 'Tis no use to deny that you know my business."

Mary looked at him intently, then she cried out, "Oh, sir, the boys will pay everything!"

"Then you are in debt?"

Mary bowed her head. "I was fearin' 'twas for that you came here."

"It is something much worse than debt I am come about."

"Dan's dead?" she whispered hoarsely. "Ah! he cannot be dead; 'tis but an hour since he went out."

"No, no, he's not dead, Mrs. Hanlon. He is with us at the station."

"Sick?"

"He came to make a confession, Mrs. Hanlon. He says—he insists—that he is guilty of a very grave offence."

"A grave offence?" repeated Mary in a bewildered way. "What may it be? He has hardly stirred from the house since the autumn. He has been sick."

"That is just what I hope," said the constable. "I trust that his mind is unhinged."

"Ah, what a hope!" cried Mary, bitterly. "What is it that he says that he has done? I was fearin' something's wrong, for since eight months he has been so changed and sad."

"This that he says he has done dates back thirteen or fourteen years."

"'Tis just about the time we came to Limerick. Ah, he'd not a' kept anything from me for ahl these years. It must be as you are sayin', sir," she cried with a sob in her voice. "He has been so changed of late, because he's mad. Let me

go to 'um." She rose from her chair quickly, and then with only a polite curiosity in her tone she asked, "And what is it that he says he did?"

"Do you remember a man named Dineen?"

"I do well. He was murdered in a very dreadful way. I will never disremember that."

"You never suspected your husband had had a hand in it?"

"My husband? Oh!" She gave a gesture of despair. "Poor soul! poor soul! he must be mad. What was he tellin' ye? Sure he does not think he did that? Ah, how he must a' suffered ahl these months! Let me go to 'um, sir, and bring 'um home."

"You shall see him by-and-bye, but you cannot bring him home—not yet, at least, Mrs. Hanlon."

"I have no fear of 'um," said Mary, quickly. "I'd like to have 'um here."

The constable looked at her again. If this was not genuine, and he did not think it was genuine, it was an admirable piece of acting.

"He must stay where he is till he has been before Mr. Haverty; that will be to-morrow, Mrs. Hanlon." Mary did not speak. A feeling of defeat came over her. "And if he sticks to his story I'm afraid he will be committed for trial. You had better send for one of your sons, I think, Mrs. Hanlon."

"I'll send for them now," she said, putting on her bonnet and shawl. "May I be going to my husband?" she inquired, and the inspector consented. She asked the man to walk with her, and as they went along she put a few questions to him about her husband. Then she said, "Did he tell ye that our son married Dineen's daughter?"

"Is that so?"

Then Mary said how her husband had disliked the match, how he had never been well since. She told her tale so well that the constable believed it. They took a long road to the police-station, for Mary wished to telegraph to young Dan

that his father was very sick, and that he must come home at once. She sent for this son first, because he was so near that he could get home that night. She told the policeman her sons' affairs very candidly. She felt instinctively that he would be more prone to believe her if she appeared candid.

When they reached the station she was shown into a bare room, and in a minute Dan was brought in to her. He hung down his head in a guilty way. "Forgive me, Marey," he said.

"Ah!" she said softly. "'Tis small thought I keep of yer offences, Dan, darlin'; 'tis yer throuble that I'm thinkin' of. They must think ye are mad. I don't know how to do ut, Dan. Ah, what will we do, my dear? How will we make thim think ye are mad?" She laid her head on his shoulder.

"I'll not pretend to be mad, Marey," said the old man. "Ye never tempted me to sin before. Don't tempt me now. I've had enough a' sin. I'll tell no lies."

"But the children, Dan?"

"God help my children, Marey! I'll go through with ut to the end."

"Have ye no thought for their shame, Dan, and her's? —that poor girl that's mar'yed yer son, and their child that's not yet born; ye might think a' them and me. Oh, Dan, Dan! what will I do without ye, Dan?"

"Don't tempt me, Marey; I must save me sowl."

Mary kissed him tenderly. "The dear Lord does not ask so much of ye, my dear. 'Tis the sorrow a' the heart he's wantin'."

"He has had that for years, Marey, for years an' years; but 'tis not enough; I feel 'tis not enough."

To all his wife's entreaties he turned a deaf ear, and she was forced to leave him still determined to stand by his confession. She went home and wrote to Michael a hurried, blotted letter, telling him what had happened; and then she prepared the bedroom for young Dan. She had finished all

and got his supper ready when there was a ring at the bell, and Dan, pale and alarmed, stood at the door.

"How is father?" he asked, as he kissed his mother.

"He is very bad, my dear," said Mary; and as the strong young arm went round her waist, she began to weep.

"Dead?" asked Dan, hoarsely.

"Not that, my dear. Ah, my child! there are worse things than death."

"Which?" asked the young man.

"Sin, shame, disgrace, lies, Dan; such lies as yer mother never told until to-day."

"Lies?" cried Dan. For what have ye been telling lies? What is ailing father. Where is he, mother?"

"Not here."

"Not at—oh! tis not the workhouse? Mother, mother," he cried, reading her sad face, and holding her wrists with his hands, "mother, I'll keep ye both; I'll work for the pair of ye, dear mother, gladly. Ye shall never want."

"'Tis sure I am of that," said Mary, kissing him. "My dear, dear boy, it is not want that is pressin' me. My dear, I don't know how to be after tellin' ye. I do not want to spoil your life, my child."

"Tell me everything, mother. I can bear anything but lies."

"Then, Dan, yer father is in gaol."

Dan's pale face became still paler. "That can't be true," he cried.

"Ah, my dear, 'tis the first true word I've been speakin' this day."

"For what?"

"For the worst, dear, for the worst. He gave 'umself up this afternoon."

"Tell me all, mother," said Dan, in a strained voice.

Then Mary told him all the sad story.

"So Michael knows of it?"

"He and his wife."

"I don't believe his wife knows."

"Dan!"

"I'm sure she doesn't know," he said, after a pause. "The more I think of ut, of her way towards me, of the things she said—no, I'm certain she doesn't know." He got up and began to pace up and down the room. "Have ye sent for Michael?" he asked at last.

"I did, this afternoon."

"There's the defence to think of," he said, after another long silence; and then he continued his pacing to and fro. He walked so till the clock struck one. Both he and his mother had forgotten the time; but the one tone of the clock aroused Mary.

"'Tis striking wun, Dan."

Dan stopped. "Give me the house key, mother; I'll be goin' out for a breathe of air."

Mary gave him the key, but she did not go to bed. She sat there watching and thinking. Presently he came in. "Will I find a pen and ink in my room?" he said.

Mary noticed that his face was deathly white, and drawn and aged. "Ye will not be writin' to Ellun?" she asked quickly.

"Certainly I will." Dan's voice was cold and distant; his manner repelled sympathy.

Mary sobbed as she brought him the ink. "She will not give ye up, my dear," she said tenderly.

"I will not ask her," said Dan, coldly. "'Tis I that will give her up." He took up his candle and went to his room.

CHAPTER XXXI.

For some time after Deirdrè regained consciousness, she sat without moving on the floor. She was so sick at heart that, for awhile, her only perception was a bewildered feeling of misery, and pain, and aching sickness; then came a loathing of life, a sense of unceasing misery, and the old terror overwhelmed her. She became cold as death, and shuddered with tearless horror. There was no flying from her fate. Her imagination, that she had thought diseased, was destitute of terror compared with this reality. Life was ghastly; yet her dread of the grave allowed her no comfort in the thought of death. She seemed in a circle of unending woe, where life and death were alike horrible.

Then she remembered Michael. She moaned, covered her face with her hands, and wailed with anguish. The thought of her husband was abhorrent to her. He was his father's son. That thought for the moment blotted out every other. Her pity for his sorrow was annulled by her loathing for his shame. She could have found it in her heart to leave him to bear his grief alone; her one desire was never to see him again, and to forget, so far as she could, the share that he had had in her life. It was not till after a hard-won fight that her compassion gained the day.

She reminded herself that, crushing as this blow was to her, it would fall still more heavily upon him. He must hear, in the most gentle words that she could find, that honour and happiness were dead. She must take every care to hide from him that his wife's heart had turned from him in his affliction. Of that base treason he must never know. He must

be more than ever dear to her; yet there was shame and guilt even in their love.

She raised herself, feeling faint and weak, and then slowly and with uncertain feet she went up the stairs. She did not know how she could break the news to him, or how he, so little used to grief or shame, would bear this irremediable ill. Time could not heal this sorrow and years were powerless to lessen its intensity; each hour would be as miserable as this; the blight of sin had withered both their lives.

When she reached the bedroom door she halted; she could not enter, she could not face the duty that was before her. Love and hatred, pity and revulsion, each strove to overcome the other. She stood and tried to pray till she gained an outward calm; then she opened the door, went in, and closed it silently behind her, and with trembling knees and blinded eyes made her way to the bedside. She laid her hand on her husband's shoulder to awake him, then, changing her purpose, she withdrew her hand and sat down. Why should she rouse him? Why should she wake the unhappy man to his anguish? She tried to quiet her sobbing breath, and resting her chin on her hands she gazed with what calm she could on Michael's unconscious face.

Thank God, there was no stamp of guilt on the wide, candid brow, on the half smiling lips. Deirdre read the face searchingly, fixing her gaze by an effort of will, though her terror-stricken eyes would fain have turned away. The fearless, honest face, open as day, worked its old spell, and as she looked at the handsome features she felt that she had at least the comfort of finding this face still the most dearly loved in the world. Her pity for her husband called forth her first tears, and as she wept she pictured with mournful interest the new sad life that they must begin together—the changed life in some far-off land, where she and Michael might bury their sorrow and hide their shame and its own from their ill-fated child. She could not picture Michael sad; she could not see

his face abashed, with furtive eyes. His face, his voice, his bearing, were fearlessness itself; he could not live robbed of that honest self-esteem; he would die of the blow that she must deal him. At that sad thought a sobbing wail escaped her; Hanlon stirred, opened his eyes, and started to see his wife sitting there.

"Why, Deirdrè, is it very late?"

She shook her head, and tried to say calmly that she did not know the time, but she could not speak.

Hanlon noted her agitation and her white face. "Are you ill, love?" he cried, "Why, Deirdrè," for she turned away, "Deirdrè," he cried, holding her arm; "what ails you, darling?"

"I am not ill," she sobbed, and sat down on the edge of the bed; "but, Michael, Michael, dearest! Ah!" she cried, throwing her arms around him and overwhelmed with pity, "how can I tell you, love? How can you bear it?"

Hanlon turned very white; his heart filled with apprehension. "Is—my mother dead?" he asked rather lamely, feeling that it was not so, but that he must needs say something.

"No, Michael, it is not death—it is not your mother. My love, prepare yourself for the greatest grief in the world"—she put her hands on his head and drew his face on to her breast that she might not see his agony. "My dearest one," she said in a low, awestruck voice, "your father—your father."

"Arrested?" whispered Michael, shudderingly.

"No," said Deirdrè, with a sudden calm. And she sprang away from him. Her limbs did not quiver any more; her knees did not shake. She walked quickly and firmly out of the room and closed the door behind her. Hanlon heard her go up the attic stairs, heard a door slam; then he heard her footfall overhead in the room they had begun preparing together for the nursery.

The key had been on the outer side the door; the hand of Deirdrè was quite steady as she removed it and fitted it to the

inner side the lock. She turned it, thankful to be alone, away from Michael—that was the only comfort fate could bring her. She must be alone—must be alone to bear the aching of her bursting heart, to support the fever of her burning indignation, the unendurable remembrance of his villainy. Her mind was a raging sea of hatred and righteous indignation.

She sat down on one of the few chairs that were in the half-furnished room. And as she sat she tried to call the past to mind. For a time her thoughts were in wild disorder, her breast heaved with emotion, her blood felt on fire, and her heart choked her at every beat. Then she became calmer, and all her acquaintance with Michael came to her memory with a chill and hateful clearness.

She thought of that afternoon at Putney four years ago, when they had first met. She had been very sad that day and indignant against Arthur for what now seemed a trivial offence. How dreary the crowded room had seemed till the bright unknown figure had entered, bringing in with it the sunshine and the summer breeze! She remembered well how she had envied him his gay and fearless bearing, his air of youth and happiness. Shameless, unnatural, that knowing who he was, he had been so light of heart! Those early days of their acquaintance came to her mind with terrible reality. Alas! alas! she must confess it. The shame was not his alone. She had loved him from that first meeting.

Michael's voice at the door recalled her from her memories. "Deirdrè," he called, "open the door! In heaven's name speak to me, Deirdrè."

For some moments she paid no heed to his entreaties; then, for the sake of quietness, she went to the door and opened it a little way, keeping her hand upon the latch so as to bar the entrance. Hanlon—tear-stained, abject, miserable—was a pitiable figure enough. Dierdrè's eyes flashed, and her lips were quivering with scorn. She had no idea of what she should say to her husband. She felt no control over the

strange voice that she heard saying, "Yes, I will open the door, and I will speak to you. I will tell you that all the love I ever felt for you is turned to hate—to hate that grows greater every moment that I have you before my eyes." She shut the door, locked it again, and wondered whether it was really she who had spoken in that calm and fluent voice.

He deserved every word, and more than every word, that she had said. She paced the room, heating the fire of her wrath by recalling all the time she had passed in his company. She remembered the quick growth of their friendship, and the pretended sympathy that he had shown when she had told him of her father's death. If he had had a spark of honour he would never have seen her after he had that knowledge. But she remembered with startling vividness how candidly he had talked about his home and the plans that they had made in later days. It was by her wish only that they had not gone to Limerick for their honeymoon. Fearful depravity! He would have taken her there—had wished her to love as a father the man who had murdered hers. Even as it was, he could not marry without paying a farewell visit to that accursed home. Suddenly a light flashed across her mind. How changed all that was now! She had heard nothing of Ireland, home, or Limerick since—since that last visit. She sank into the chair and sat very still in deep thought. At the end of half an hour she rose, unlocked the door, and went down to the study.

Michael was there, seated with his arms folded on his desk, and his head on his arms. When his wife came into the room he stood up wondering. And she, going up to him, opened her arms and said, "My dear, I am very sorry for you."

Then Hanlon, falling at her feet, told her all his wretched story. He hid nothing, he did not seek to excuse himself; and Deirdrè, mindful of her own shortcomings and of the strength of his temptation, made only one reproach. "How could you be so happy?" she said when he had finished.

"I forgot almost all about it," answered Hanlon, simply.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HANLON went over to Ireland by the night mail. He had been extremely unwilling to go, and had discovered a number of reasons, professional and otherwise, which made it utterly impossible for him to leave London. Deirdrè had maintained that it was his duty to go, and although she did not tell him so, she longed to be alone, to have a little breathing time in which to learn to love the new Michael, who was so different, and, alas! so much less dear, than the Michael she had lost for ever.

Still the question had remained open till, late in the afternoon, a telegram had arrived from young Dan, saying that their father was committed for trial, but that it was not likely that he would live for many days.

By travelling all night, Michael could reach Limerick at noon. It seemed to him impossible that he could live through that arrival, and as the time drew near he began to hope madly that death or a miracle would interpose to save him from that ordeal. But the train stopped at the station just in the ordinary way, and Michael, with an elaborate indifference of manner, got out. In a moment there was a hand on his shoulder. "Well, Mick!" It was his brother, who had come to meet him. Dan was unconscious of pity or curiosity; he put his arm through his brother's and walked away, without even seeing that anyone looked at them. As they went along he told Michael of the events of the day before—that father had looked very sick, that he had pleaded guilty, and that when he had seen his wife and son he had fainted.

"He'll not be needing a defence, Mick," said the young man sadly; "he will not live a week."

Michael made no comment on the news; he could not say that he hoped his father would die. "And mother?" he asked.

"Ah, mother's a wonderful woman," said Dan. "She has persuaded every one that father is innocent—including me." Dan smiled rather strangely as he said this.

"Nonsense, Dan; he's not in the least like a madman."

"Well, an' he's not the least like a murderer. Until I see proof that he did it, I will believe that he did not."

"And Ellen?"

"She has nothing to say to the question," said Dan, quickly.

"Has she thrown you over?" asked Michael, indignantly. He always thought Dan too good for his elderly charmer, and marvelled at the infatuation.

"No," said Dan, calmly, "I have thrown her over. But we won't discuss the subject."

"If she is worth having she won't release you." Deirdrè, he knew, would not have given him up for a like cause, and Deirdrè was always right.

"Oh yes, she will," said Dan, grimly. "I shall tell her she is too old."

"That will be—Won't that be—a little brutal?"

"I won't say it unless I'm hard pressed. Annything, to my mind, would be less brutal than—" Dan stopped, remembering that Michael had known his father's crime before he married.

Michael pressed his brother's arm. "You go as much too far one way, old fellow, as I did the other."

"Ah, then, she didn't know?" said Dan, half to himself and very sadly, for despite all his talk he had found comfort in the thought of Michael's happy marriage. Neither man spoke again till they reached their home.

A little damsel, a neighbour's child, was minding the house. Mrs. Hanlon, she told them, had been sent for to the gaol,

and had left word that they were to follow her. Their father was taken ill, the child said; so the young men crossed Thomond Bridge and went to the borough gaol.

Mrs. Hanlon had been sent for soon after young Dan had set out to meet his brother. She had been shown first to the governor's room, and then taken through doors that were locked behind her down long straight passages whose very lightness seemed to stifle her. At last she reached the infirmary. Here, too, as in the passages, all was of spotless whiteness. The ceiling and walls were white, and through a high window the summer sunshine streamed, making a track of dusty rays and a bright square of glowing whiteness on the wall.

The bed, too, was white; it seemed to Mary that her husband's face and hair were whiter than all. The spotless whiteness gave a certain sacredness and nobility to the poor mean place. She sat down by the bed and took her husband's hand in hers. The old man opened his eyes.

"'Twas ye that was right, Marey," he said in a low voice. "I should not a' towld."

His wife only kissed him for answer.

"I would a' wished to take the punishment a' my sin," he said after a time.

"Nevur will I believe ye did ut, darlin'," cried Mary, passionately. "Sure, Dan, ye nevur did ut?"

"Well," said the old man, raising his weak hand to his head, "I was just wunderin' that meself. Sometimes," he added, with a deprecatory smile, "I think I did; an' sometimes I think I did not."

"Whatever made ye say ye did ut, Dan?" she said. There was no reproach, only pity, in her voice.

"Because I did do ut," said Dan, morosely.

"But, Dan"—Mary held his hand firmly and betrayed no eagerness in her voice—"ye said, my dear, ye were not sure. Try an' make sure, Dan; for the children's sake, try and be sure."

"Well, for the children's sake, let us say I did not." The

old man spoke with weary indifference. He sighed, closed his eyes, and lay, his hand resting in his wife's till the sound of footsteps on the bare floor aroused him. "Sure 'tis the boys," he said, opening his eyes. The sight of Michael revived the memory of their last meeting. "Mick, I cannot look ye in the face."

Michael bent down and kissed his father.

"God reward ye, Mick. 'Tis a good son ye are—a good son. There's not another man in Ireland would a' done that." He took no notice of his second son, but it was Dan who said tenderly—

"Ah, ye never did it, father."

"Well," said the old man, "'tis just that that's puzzling me. I can't," he said, turning his glazed eyes towards his son, "I can't rightlee remember, Dan. It—it is not important, is it, Dan?" he added vaguely.

"Ah," cried Michael, "this is terrible! Father, remember. Oh, for God's sake remember! Think of Deirdrè. Think of our child. Father, remember—remember!"

Old Hanlon rubbed his hand across his brow. "There is something impetuous about poor Mick, Marey," he said, turning to his wife. "'Tis like yourself that he is, Marey; and Dan—sure 'tis Dan is like me—like yer father, Dan."

"Oh!" groaned Michael, "I shall go mad; I can't endure this. Mother, for God's sake make him speak the truth."

"Yes, father," Dan was saying in his quiet voice, "'tis I that am like you; but now, father dear, try to think what was it ye were doin' after mother and the children left the farm, and ye found Johnnie dead at John Maloney's. What did ye do? Ye went out. Ye remember that?"

"And nevr a colder night can I call to mind than that, Dan. 'Twas a bittur wind. I remember the wind after ahl these years. We think 'tis keen—the spring wind—on the bridge, but 'tis just nothing at ahl compared to the wind at Ballymoneyboy. Ye will be rememberin' the spring winds, Marey? They blew the pigsthy down two years before we

left, though 'twas yourself, Dan, that helped to build the new wun. Butler got the value a' that improvement, like all the others, though he did not pay the doctor's bill for yer broken leg, Dan. Ye have not forgotten that, eh? Ah, how ye did sob, poor child! But ye were very patient, Dan; in that ye're like yer mother. Marey is always patient, an' she has had a tryin' time, a very tryin' time—it must be gettin' on for fourteen years. What is that sound?"—he broke off, trying to raise himself on his elbow—"some one is sobbing. Ah, it is Mick. Sure, Mick, ye're not offended that yer old father said ye were a bit impetuous? An' none the worse for that, my dear, none the worse, not wun bit the worse," he repeated consolingly.

Michael was sobbing his heart out. This fearful uncertainty seemed to him far worse than the saddest knowledge, and every moment there appeared to be less chance of learning the truth. Mary and young Dan were both quiet and composed, though neither spoke.

"My poor owld head," said the sick man turning towards his wife, "is gettin' sadlee muddled, Marey. I cannot call to mind this room." He said this in a gentle deprecating way, with a wistful smile.

"'Twas yer own wish to come here, Dan, darlin'. Sure ye remember that ye gave yerself up for the murder a'——"

"I'll not live to be hanged I have been waitin' too long—too long, Marey, to make the atonement; but ye were so set against ut for the children's sake. Ah, the poor children! I cannot bear to hear 'em sob like that. Never mind me, Marey; go to Mick and comfort 'um." He turned his face away and fell into a kind of sleep.

His wife was allowed to stay with him. There seemed so much doubt of his guilt and of his life that she was permitted to watch by him for a time, but the young men went to their melancholy home. Michael was in a frantic state of grief, racked by this terrible suspense. He could not rest; he paced the little parlour to and fro, storming, sobbing, entreating

fate for any certainty, anything rather than this dreadful hope and fear. Dan took his trouble apathetically; he sat with his head in his hands in an attitude that reminded Michael unbearably of their father. Towards post-time he got up and, putting his arm round his brother, said—

"Mick, ye must not be forgettin' that there is a hope."

"That's the worst part of the whole business; 'tis a false hope."

"Well, we can't be sure a' that. Annyway, I would make the most of it to Deirdrè."

"Good gracious, I had forgotten! What a brute I am; now the post's gone."

"It is half an hour of post-time."

"What a mercy I thought of it in time. Ink! there is no ink in this accursed hole," cried Michael, looking frantically in the most unlikely places.

"There is everything ye can wish for in my room, and here, too, for that matter," said Dan, smiling.

Michael preferred to go upstairs; in twenty minutes he came down with his letter. "You take it, Dan," he cried, "you're as inscrutable as the sphinx; my face would hang our father, if any one saw it." Then he added, "Has Ellen written to you, Dan?"

"No; what should she do that for?" said Dan, defiantly, as he took up his hat.

There was a change on Michael's face when he got back. "There's a visitor for you, Dan," said the elder brother as he opened the door, and by his voice and smile Dan guessed who the visitor must be. He rushed into the little parlour, where a woman past thirty, small and pale, with black hair drawn tightly from a high, broad forehead, sat waiting for him. Her eyes, her only fine feature, were disfigured by spectacles. She was for Dan the one perfect woman. She had risen when she heard her lover come in.

"Dan!" she cried, throwing her little lean hands round his neck. She was so small that she could not keep them there

unless Dan bent or held her up in his arms. It was easier for him to hold the light weight up to his heart, but he did not kiss her.

"God bless you, love," he said softly, forgetting for the moment that they had agreed that there was no God. "But, Ellun, dear, ye should not a' come; it makes it very hard for me to give you up."

"Give me up?" cried Ellen, suddenly. She lifted her face from his neck—"Dan, I am not going to let you give me up."

Dan set her down on the floor. "I cannot bring shame, Ellun, to the girl I love."

"Father says that you do not love me, Dan—that you make this trouble an excuse to leave me honourably because I am ugly and—and old."

"Ellun!"

"It is no use to look like that; I was seven years old, Dan, when you were born."

"Had ye been twenty-seven what difference would that a' made?" He turned away that she might not see his face.

"If you do love me, Dan, really truly love me——"

"To release ye is the best proof of that." He still kept his face turned away.

"Look at me, Dan! Tell me the truth. Dan, is it true that it is only honour that has kept you to me all these years?"

The young man turned his sad white face towards her. "Ye know that ye are dearer to me than the whole world," he said. His voice was cold, almost reproachful, but his eyes, though sad, were a lover's eyes.

"Then I will tell you what I think, Dan—only in pity do not say you love me if it is not true." She paused a moment, and reading his answer in his face, went on in an agitated tone. "Dan, it will be the meanest thing in the world if you give me up against my will. I am lonely, I am old; yes, I am old. You have had my youth, you have had my heart, when I might have had other lovers. Johnny McManus is married now he——"

"Ellun!"

"Be silent, Dan, let me finish. But for you I might have been his wife. Who do you think will marry a penniless spinster of thirty-three, a freethinker, a woman who has been for years engaged to another man?"

"Don't, Ellun, don't be talking like that; it's paining you and it's not deceiving me. Ye do not mean a word ye say."

"Do I not?" she cried with a sob in her voice. "Have I a very happy life before me if you throw me over? You cannot think it an honourable thing to do, to break your promise against my will." She covered her face with her hands.

"Don't say another word," cried Dan in a broken voice. He drew her hands from her face and kissed them reverently. "I have loved ye now, Ellun, over six years. Ye cannot think I do not know ye yet. Never once in all those years have ye been to my lodgings; and now, because I am disgraced, you come to my house at night. Ye have always been a little cold to me. I can remember every kiss ye ever gave me until to-night. Ye have always told me I was free to take ye or to leave ye. Ellun, I—I cannot leave ye; but nothing—no, darling, nothing—that ye can say will hide from me that ye are making a sacrifice so great that I ought not to let ye make it."

"If you think that, you do not know how much I love you."

"Ah, Ellun! It must indeed be a grave occasion would make ye confess that."

"I always love you, Dan; but I love you most when you're sick or in trouble. I would die if you were to give me up to-night."

Miss Brophy had to return to Cloughdundrum by the mail which leaves Limerick shortly before eleven. Dan, of course, could not let her go alone at that time of night, so it was arranged that he should take her to her home, and come back to Limerick by the early morning train. Miss Brophy protested, he looked so white and faint. Then Dan remembered

that he had had no food since early morning, and that she ought not to depart supperless. He found where the various things were kept, and then, when Ellen had laid the cloth, went up to the bedroom where Michael was.

"Ellen is going to stick to me," he said eagerly. "Come down, Mick, and thank her; tell her——"

Michael rose and went down with his brother. "I thought you were going to tell her she is too old," he said smiling. He wondered what there was to love in Ellen. Sympathy with the sorrow-stricken men made her very silent and subdued. Moreover, now that she had done it, she was ashamed of having sought out Dan. She had never before been bold or unwomanly, and she asked herself whether to-night she had not been unwomanly? She fancied that there was a reproach in Michael's merely indifferent, half-curious gaze.

Michael did not trouble to bar the door after she and Dan had set out; he merely closed it, and then crept wearily to bed. He had not slept on his journey, and was exhausted with emotion and fatigue. His sleep was deep and heavy, and he did not wake till after nine. He rose at once, feeling ashamed to have slept so late. He must go to the gaol to ask how his father was. He had meant to be there before now. There was a sound of someone setting out breakfast things, and on going down he found that his mother had returned.

"Oh, mother!" he cried, "father's not—surely father is not dead?"

"That would not be a very sad thing, my dear, to befall a poor disgraced old man."

"Then he is dead?"

"He is, Mick; he died soon after six this morning; but he died in peace, my dear, and—and in his bed. Michael, we must thank God for that."

"Ah, my poor mother!"

Mary stretched out her arms, and sinking on to the floor, buried her face in her husband's old chair. "I wish I was with 'um," she wailed. "Ah! I wish I was with 'um. Dan,

Dan, my man! what will I do without ye? I wish I was dead—I wish I was dead! Oh, Michael! how will I bear it? However will I live without 'um?"

Michael knelt beside her, and consoled her in the best way he could. A poor half-hearted consolation it seemed to him, for he knew that in his heart he was glad his father was dead. But Mary found sweet comfort in the caresses of her eldest and her favourite son.

"Did he say anything more?" said Michael, when his mother became calmer.

"He could not rightlee remember." Mrs. Hanlon reddened a little as she said this.

"Nothing more?"

"No; nothing more."

"But," said Michael, hoarsely, "I suppose he did do it?"

"Ah, my dear, who shall say? We can never know. Believe, my son, that he did not."

"But what do you believe, mother?"

"Ah, Mick! I would be the last to suspect 'um."

"Yet, when he told you you believed him."

"I did," she said sadly. "May the Lord forgive me for that same."

"And now, mother, do you suspect him?"

"Perhaps, my son, 'tis for the best that we can never know."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MICHAEL HANLON'S great desire was to get away from Limerick. He felt as though he could not remain there for the two days that were to intervene between his father's death and the interment. The atmosphere of suspicion and shame was intensely oppressive to his spirit. He was thoroughly convinced of his father's guilt, and he could not behave as though he believed him innocent—he could not face the neighbours who came with friendly curiosity to console Mrs. Hanlon, he could not look his young brothers or his sisters in the face. No one could have suspected that either Mrs. Hanlon, or Dan, doubted the dead man's innocence. Michael watched with amazement the candid sadness with which they discussed the old man's "delusion." He had believed them far less capable of deception than himself, but never for one instant did either of them allow their true feelings to appear, and Michael soon guessed that there was a tacit understanding between them to shield the younger children from the knowledge of their father's crime.

Dan saw to everything. He could stay, he said, just as long as his mother needed him. Ellen could see to the *Sunburst* as well as he, and there was no hurry at all for him to get back to Cloughdrum.

There was a comfortable feeling about Dan that his sole business in life was the making of funeral arrangements and the winding up of affairs. Those sort of things did not oppress Dan, Michael thought, as they did him; but the truth was that Dan's mind was easy, whereas Michael was tortured by remorse.

He had believed he would feel better when once he was away from Limerick, but as he neared home he got to dread the meeting with his wife. The memory of her face and quiet passionate voice, when she told him that she hated him, dwelt in his mind. What if she should tell him that again? Wretched though he was, he could not think that he deserved her pity; he had been too villainous, and in the days that she had spent alone she would have had time to forget his remorse and realise his villainy.

He had telegraphed to her that he should return by the night mail immediately after the funeral, and as the cab turned the corner of Keppel Street he leaned forward and looked at the windows of his house. The train had been late, it was nearly nine o'clock. All the other houses were open and awake; only his own was still asleep, and that at an hour before which Deirdrè had usually returned from mass. Was she ill, or could it be that she had left him?

He put the key in the latch, eager, yet dreading to go in. The door opened before he turned the key, and in a moment a wan ghost of his wife was in his arms, kissing and consoling him with whispered words of love and pity. She drew him into the darkened dining-room, where the breakfast was ready. Hanlon wondered for a moment why all the house was dark; then it flashed upon him that Deirdrè had left it so in order that he might see that respect had been paid to the dishonoured father.

"You have been ill," he cried with sharp self-reproach when his eyes grew accustomed to the dim light and he saw how changed and worn his wife was.

She sat down in her place at the table and made a sign to him to take his seat; she tried to smile and say that she was well, but no sound came from her white lips.

Hanlon went to his place; but instead of sitting down, he turned abruptly and threw himself at her feet. "My queen, my saint, you are not able to forgive me! Shall I go from

you, Deirdrè? Is it horrible to you to have me here? Speak the word, love, and you shall never see my accursed face again."

She bent down and kissed him. "Michael!" She laid her head on his shoulder and wept.

"How can you forgive me!" cried Hanlon, with a gesture of despair. "Never, never, will I forgive myself."

"Then," said Deirdrè, gently, "there will be one thing I cannot forgive you." She was determined not to let her husband know how hard had been the struggle to forgive him and take him back to her heart. His surmise that in his absence his sin would dwell more in her memory than his remorse, was true, and there had been moments when her revulsion to him had seemed unconquerable. Indeed, much as she had striven to resolve to love him, it was not till she saw his contrite face that she had been able to feel much tenderness towards him. Yet, distasteful though the thought of his return had been, the nights and days that she had spent alone had been half mad with terrors. All her old dreams, all her long-slumbering horrors, were aroused. The nights had been so terrible that she had thought each morning would find her dead or mad. The days had been more fearful than any since the dread last days at Ballymoneyboy.

Yet she had not realised till he was there the comfort Michael's presence was to her. She was still sad, still terrified, but there was now a refuge from her terror; and for some days he was so heartbroken and depressed that Deirdrè scarcely remembered how full her own soul was of grief. It made her heart bleed to see Michael so altered and cast down. But before a month had passed Hanlon held up his head as of old, and looked hopefully at life out of his clear and candid eyes; his step regained its buoyancy, his voice its mellow cheerfulness, and his laughter its old infectious ring. He did not forget his father, or his mother's grief. His bright expressive face would cloud at times, and sorrow would set her seal upon its facile lines. If this mood came over him

when he was at home, Deirdrè noted it with a silent sympathy and a great tenderness, for it was at these times that his soul seemed nearest to her own. But if Rose Campbell or any other favourite friend came in, how quickly the cloud passed. In two minutes Michael was the old Michael, the merry, the witty, the gay. And it was not feigned, this lightheartedness, this quick wit, this lively sense of what was droll or strange. Hanlon was not only making others laugh, he laughed himself, not only with the lips and eyes, but with heart and mind.

Deirdrè would watch and wonder. This was the man whose soul she had thought so nearly attuned to her own, and she had known no more of the working of his mind than of an unopened book. She felt now that she had not begun to understand him. Her own mind moved slowly, and was, moreover, cast in a mould of gloom and sadness; her thoughts changed slowly as the light on a grey cloudy day.

But Hanlon's moods were like the swift cloud and sunshine that chase each other on a breezy sunny day. His depression seemed the blacker for the brightness that had gone before; but it did not last—at least, not as yet. There had not gathered clouds enough to cover Hanlon's sunny sky with gloom. He had Deirdrè, and having her, had sun to brighten his whole life. From the first he had been so tender, so indulgent, so loving to her that further kindness seemed impossible. Every wish of hers that he had thought of he had always tried to gratify, but now he remembered all her wishes. He devoted not only his spare time, but many hours that by rights were his work time, to her amusement. He was to her as we wish we had been towards our dead. And this great kindness, this unfailing tenderness and love, more than atoned to her for the wrong he had done. Love could not dispel her sadness, it could not lighten the gloom that settled like a disease upon her mind; but it gave a sweetness to her sorrow, and made these days of pain and

weakness, of despair and soul-sickness, precious beyond many happier ones.

To each this summer time had the wistful yearning of a farewell.

In August the waiting came to an end. Deirdrè's weak frame could no longer carry the burden that had ceased to be a joy to her, and the child, from whose birth Hanlon had hoped so much, came dead into the world. With it died his brightest hopes, for the mother, weak and delirious, seemed likely to follow her child.

Hanlon had known no grief to compare with this; there was barely a hope that she would live. He felt he could have borne even that had he been allowed to see his wife; but the doctors sternly and absolutely denied her room to him. They gave no reason for this prohibition; they merely said that the sight of him would kill her.

Hanlon had telegraphed at once to Cloughdundrum, where his mother was visiting Dan, and Mary Hanlon was in London less than twenty-four hours after her son had sent for her. By dint of much questioning and entreating the unhappy man learned from her that it was of him that Deirdrè raved—that she thought he had caused their baby's death. There was no need to tell him the details; his mind grasped the ghastly truth at once. She thought he had buried their child alive. Mary could not deny that it was so.

He felt as though he could not bear his life from hour to hour; each minute was an eternity. He spent the long days watching on the stairs, waiting for the scanty news that his mother or the nurse brought to him; listening to Deirdrè's weak wailing voice as it implored them to save her child; listening to the awful silences and the hushed mysterious movements and whispers as the nurses moved in the forbidden room. His thoughts through those long hours were very bitter and humble. This was, he felt, the just punishment of his sin; but it was unendurable, to feel that he had brought such terrible suffering on the innocent woman he

loved. Had it not been that she was dependent on his earnings, he would have put an end to his unhappy life. Even as it was, though he fully realised how cowardly and criminal such an act would be, his razors suggested such a simple escape from all his shame and sorrow that, knowing the weakness of his nature, he locked them in a drawer and threw away the key. Then he regretted what he had done, not because it was a confession of weakness, but because he had cut off his easiest retreat.

There was, however, one sane necessity before him—he must work. His savings, more than his savings, had been expended in furnishing the house; his wife must be maintained; the expenses of this illness must be paid by the fruit of his troubled and disordered brain. He tried to rouse himself and to work at home, but in vain. Still he went every evening to the office. Every moment he feared a messenger would come to tell him his wife was dead. And as he wrote, his thoughts were a thousand miles from the leaders he was writing. Those hours at the office were the most wearing and wretched of the whole unhappy day. He wondered afterwards how he lived through them; and each night, as he went home, he felt he could not live through such anxious misery again. Things went on thus for more than a week. Sleep had ceased to be necessary to him; and he was so wakeful and restless that he preferred sitting up. It soon came to seem to him that all his life had been passed in this way: in anxious watching, in eager listening to heart-rending sobs and sadder silences, in hours of mental torture at the office, in dreary fluctuations between a trifle better and not quite so well.

But one night, when he came home, there was a smile on his mother's face. She raised her hand and whispered, "Hush! she is having a beautiful natural sleep. 'Tis fine news, my dear."

Michael looked at her with dull unseeing eyes; something seemed to give way in his brain. He became suddenly con-

scious that his head would split if he did not hold it together with his hands.

"Asleep?" he said, with a dreary smile. "Is that good news?"

His head was aching so terribly that he could hardly understand. It cost him an effort to remember why he was so anxious, why he had been so sad. Everything but his pain was so far off. All that he knew was that he was ill.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HANLON knew little of the next few weeks ; they passed like a long weary dream that was mostly nightmare and burning heat and thirst, unquenchable thirst. Then came a time when he was cool and not thirsty any more, when a dim memory returned to him of a life that had been very sorrowful, and that somehow belonged to him ; of a dying wife, who was still ill, but who, they told him, was getting better, and was not so weak as he.

When he was lifted out of bed, and strong enough to sit for half an hour, propped up in an armchair, he saw two hands as white as ivory and as bony as the hands of death. The arms that belonged to them were quite amusing, they were such odd shrunken things. They did not seem to belong to him at all ; they did not move when he wished them to, perhaps because his mind was so wandering that he could not wish very earnestly for anything. He had altogether a strange dim feeling of being someone else. Those hands were not his hands ; that high, weak, querulous pipe was not his voice ; and when his mother brought in a basket of flowers with Mrs. Campbell's love it was not surely he, Michael Hanlon, who burst into childish, unmanly tears.

The only things that were his own were the weary bones that ached and ached with the fatigue of sitting up. Then he thought he would like to see his face. Perhaps that, too, was altered, like his mind and voice and hands.

His mother thought he had had enough for one day. Sure he was tired now ; but no, he would see his face. He insisted with childish persistence. His face was not so amusing as

his hands. He took one look, and then turned his weak head away.

He saw a face white, with blue circles round the eyes, and lips that were grey. They were not even the shape of his own lips; they were so stretched and drawn that it seemed to him that he was all mouth. The teeth seemed to be starting through the thin lips; cheeks there were none, and the hard white skin scarcely sufficed to cover the bones of his face. Two small dull eyes peered from the depths of dark hollow caverns. It was a death's head, a hard skeleton face, softened only by a few wisps of lanky hair. He could not believe this ghastly object was himself. He became so ashamed of the grim face that he turned it away when next the nurse entered the room, but what made this ugliness so sorrowful was that he felt sure Deirdrè would not know him.

And Deirdrè did not know him, though he waited before going to her until he felt quite fat and handsome. It was the saddest meeting possible. Deirdrè was sitting by the open window when her husband came in to her with his shuffling sick man's gait and his high-pitched piping voice.

She did not know the face, still less the voice, and was indignant at what she thought a base fraud. She was most angry with Mary Hanlon, for Michael's weakness moved her to pity. But the sight of him revived all her first agony. Hour after hour Hanlon heard her voice pleading, begging, entreating them in despairing accents to save her child.

A few weeks later he was again allowed to see her. It was the same thing. Then came the doctors' verdict that he must not see her any more.

But Hanlon made no comment on his wife's state. He did not ask the doctors whether she was mad. They wondered whether he knew what her illness was; he made no sign. Each day he asked them how she was. Each day they said that she was better, and with that he seemed satisfied.

One day when he was well enough to go about, to do a

little work, well enough to need change of air, the physicians came into his study and told him that his wife needed country air; and he too wanted a change, they said.

"Country?" said Hanlon. "Surely October is a little late for the country?"

"I should advise Mrs. Hanlon passing the winter in the country," said Dr. Bland, suavely.

Hanlon looked very grave. "It can't be done. My work keeps me in town. 'Tis my only income," he added simply.

"Never said anything about you," cried Dr. Brusque. "Six weeks at the sea will set you up right enough. Any cheerful place will do for you. But your wife wants care, plenty of care, and fresh air."

"She can have care here——"

"And fresh air?" asked Brusque, ironically. "Can she sit sunning herself in the street? Can she take the air in that back yard? She's tired before she's at the foot of this treadmill staircase. You can't keep a——"

"Invalid here," struck in Bland, with a glare at his colleague. "You must be aware, Mr. Hanlon, that after an illness such as your wife has had she will want watching, hourly watching, for some considerable time."

"Now, what would you call some considerable time?" asked Hanlon, meditatively balancing his paper-knife across his hand. Dr. Brusque, what would you call some——"

"It is impossible for me to generalise," said Bland, suavely. "These—these er—delusions——"

Hanlon raised his head suddenly, and looked Brusque full in the face. "Is she mad?" he asked abruptly.

"She will be well in time," muttered Brusque, while Bland murmured gently, "Oh, come now, that is a very brutal way of putting it."

Hanlon pushed back his seat, and rose and went to the window. "So you have been asking me to send her to a madhouse. You have been telling me to put my wife away from me."

"My dear boy," said Brusque, "it's the only thing for you to do."

"I should er—hardly call Dr. Guardem's establishment a madhouse," said Bland in a tone that was at once sympathetic and shocked.

"You can't believe that I am capable of such infamy?" cried Hanlon with blazing eyes. "You cannot seriously think I should put my wife away for illness——"

"We don't ask you to make a permanent arrangement," began Bland.

"Permanent!" echoed Hanlon, sadly.

"No, no," cried Brusque; "no permanent arrangement will be made. I don't even say send her for a year. Just let her go to Guardem's while you are at the sea, and then you will be stronger, calmer, more able to look things in the face."

Hanlon shook his head slowly from side to side in a way unconsciously copied from his wife.

"Not for a day shall she go to a madhouse."

"I fear," said Bland, rising, "that this news has given you a considerable shock. I fancied the nature—the sad nature—of poor Mrs. Hanlon's——"

Hanlon turned with a movement of impatience.

"Had talking enough for one day, eh?" cried Brusque, cheerfully; "but," he said, laying his hand on the young man's shoulder, "you mustn't take things too hard. Ten to one, long before you are my age, your wife will be as well as ever she was in her life."

Hanlon sank into a chair. He did not speak. Brusque was a man of about sixty.

Bland sought to repair the error with some cheering commonplace.

"The greatest kindness you can do me, doctor," said Hanlon, gently, "is to leave me by myself."

A few days later Brusque returned to the attack. He found Hanlon with a very sad face.

"Cheer up!" cried the doctor, "she's better already. She will be well all in good time. Cheer up."

"It is not very easy to cheer up," said Hanlon, gloomily.

"No, I admit that quite; but it's not, you know, like a hopeless case."

"How am I to know that it's not a hopeless case? You would not say so if it were."

"There is no earthly reason why she should not get well."

"Or why she should."

"Yes, there is every reason why she should. She may not, I allow that. You may not. I may die in my carriage on my way home. That is just about as likely as that Mrs. Hanlon's reason will not return with her physical strength."

"I have been wondering where to live," said Hanlon, in a practical tone of voice. "I thought of Hampstead. What do you say to that? It is a fine air, and I could manage that."

"And live with your wife? Not to be thought of. Remember how the sight of you excites her. She must not see you if you want her to get well."

Hanlon winced, but he said, very quietly—

"Well, then, I'll not see her, but I'll live in the same house."

Brusque got up and began to pace excitedly to and fro.

"What Quixotic rubbish!" he cried sharply. "Lord! isn't your life dreary enough already? My dear young fellow, you don't know what a ruin you are going to make of your life."

"As far as that goes, the ruin's made already. You must let me do the best I can with the *débris*."

"You are the eldest of your family, ain't you?" asked the doctor abruptly.

"I am," said Michael, surprised by this sudden turn in the conversation.

"And your father's dead, eh?"

"He is."

"Then you have no one to advise you—no one on whose judgment you can rely?"

"In this matter I can rely upon my own judgment and on my mother's."

"Nonsense, my dear boy. Could Solomon rule his own conduct, eh? You don't pretend to be wiser than Solomon, do you? No, of course not. And as for your mother, she's a splendid woman, but—— Well, women are all alike—noble, impracticable creatures. Why don't we let 'em vote, eh? Because they've got no judgment. You're not for women's rights?"

Hanlon shook his head.

"Of course not; yet if they had judgment we couldn't deny 'em a vote. But they have no head. It's all here." And the doctor thumped the region where the affections are supposed to have their seat. "I don't think you have much judgment yourself, you know—Quixotic, young. Ah me! I wish I were as young."

"I would change ages with you if I could."

"No, you would not. You think you would, but you would not. How old are you? I forget. Thirty?"

"Twenty-six."

"Good Lord! Just the age of my second boy. You won't think it an intrusion if I speak to you as I would to my son?"

"Well, that depends. I'm not much used to advice," said Hanlon, smiling.

"You must take it as you like. I shall say my say and do my duty. Now, if either of my boys were afflicted as you are—oh, good Lord!—I should break my heart. Twenty-six! Don't make your life sadder than it is. Place the poor thing where she will be cared for and happy. Treasure the memory of her as she was, so that when she gets well her illness may be like a dream."

"And never see her?"

"Where's the use? You can look at her through a window; that's all. She may not see you. Don't sacrifice your life to

a mad idea. I don't say forget her. Love her memory and live in hope, but in the meantime get what you can out of life, enjoy such pleasures as are left to you."

"I think you do not understand," said Hanlon, quietly, speaking with difficulty; "but my wife is dearer to me—not her memory, but she herself as she is—mad, you understand—she is dearer to me, mad, than all the pleasure in the world. To be near her, even if I may not see her, is the one solace that is left to me." It cost him much to say this.

For a few moments Brusque was silent. "If you feel like that there is no more to be said;" then, laying his hand on the young man's thin shoulder, he added, "Try being parted for a month."

"No, not for a day," said Hanlon, firmly, and there was an end of the discussion.

As for Bland, he never re-opened the subject. He was younger, and seemed to feel less interest in his patients. But when Christmas brought its load of bills, Hanlon found paternal affection charged at a heavy price; while Bland had felt so much interest in Mrs. Hanlon's case, and her husband's fever had been so instructive, that his services had been more than paid for in experience.

CHAPTER XXXV.

PRETTY Mrs. Campbell was sincerely afflicted at the many sorrows that had befallen her friends. We have already heard of her leaving flowers at their house, and with the flowers she always left some kind message. More than once she asked Hanlon to dine with them; but though she chose Tuesday and Saturday, which used to be his off-nights, Hanlon had, each time she asked him, a professional engagement. Campbell learned that he was seen nowhere, not even at the club. But one May afternoon, as the Captain was lounging homewards along Piccadilly, he heard someone call him by his name, and turning, saw a tall, grey-bearded man, whose figure and voice were somehow familiar to him.

"I've been flying all down the street to speak to you," said this person, laughing. "I knew your back, and you can't recognise my face."

"Surely, it's Hanlon!" cried the Captain, grasping him by the hand. "How are you, old fellow? I am glad to see you."

"Well, after all my run, I need not say I am glad to see you," said Hanlon, with his old smile of mouth and eyes.

"I don't know. Why have you not been to see us all this while?"

"I have had no time," said Hanlon, quickly; "moving house, and the getting in and out of town. I don't know what to do first, I'm so busy; but I could not see you without asking after your wife and little one."

"Come and see for yourself. Our place is only just round the corner,"

Hanlon protested that he had not time. Some other day he

would go; but for all that he found himself following Campbell up the stairs of the little house in Bolton Street.

As they went into the drawing-room they heard a sound of low amused laughing. Rose was alone, and she was reading.

"Here's Hanlon, Rose," announced the Captain, and Mrs. Campbell sprang up and held out her two hands.

"How nice, how awfully jolly," she cried heartily. "I was just laughing over your new book, don't you know. How *can* you think of such funny things; it's *too* amusing. How nice to see you all right again." She spoke as though Hanlon looked precisely the same person as when she last saw him before his troubles.

"Oh, I have been well for months."

"I wonder you are not ashamed to confess it. I thought, don't you know, that you might still be delicate, which would have been *some* excuse for not coming to see us all this time." Mrs. Campbell was speaking very fast, and, Hanlon thought, nervously. "You look so awfully well, though, that I don't believe you ever really were so very ill after all."

"Well, after that I will not say that you are looking well, Mrs. Campbell."

"Why not?" asked Rose; and then, in answer to a certain expression, half sad and half amused, that she saw on Hanlon's aged and altered face, she blushed. "It is only your beard, you know, that changes you;" then turning to her husband she asked him to see whether baby had come in. "You would like to see her, Mr. Hanlon," she said, as Campbell left the room. "She is such a darling, and she is named Deirdrè. Her manner had suddenly become gentle and grave. "May I go and see the real Deirdrè?" she said softly.

"She would be very glad," said Hanlon, rising; "but you must not think that we expect so much, Mrs. Campbell, either she or I. She knows what is the matter with her."

"How dreadful!"

"I am told it is a good sign. She used not to know it. She

is much better. But 'tis a subject I cannot discuss. All I wish to say is we are both sure of your friendship. We don't need you to prove it by a visit so painful as that would be as yet."

"I should like it—I should enjoy it," pleaded Rose, with more goodwill than truth. "I should have been long ago only for baby, don't you know."

"You are very kind."

"Oh, don't say that!" cried Rose, reproachfully. "You make me feel such a beast. I would have gone, baby and all, only I did not think she saw people."

"She has seen no one but my mother and her—her servant."

"Not you?"

Hanlon shook his head. "I must be off," he said, putting out his hand. "No, indeed, Mrs. Campbell, I cannot stay. I will barely have time to write my article as it is. Good-bye."

"He has gone," said Rose to her husband when he came back to the drawing-room, "and oh, Alex, she won't see him yet."

Then Mrs. Campbell buried her face in her husband's shirt collar, and wept in sympathy for the sorrow that had made Michael Hanlon old at twenty-seven. Each day she intended making her promised pilgrimage to Hampstead; every day she was glad that some engagement or bad weather made it impossible for her to go, until one sunny July afternoon she found herself with a blank page in her engagement book. There was no help for it; she must go.

She was driven, it seemed to her, for miles and miles, till at length her carriage stopped before a high garden wall, over whose summit nodded garlands of roses, woodbine, and clematis.

A maid opened the high green gate.

"Is Mrs. Hanlon in?" hazarded Rose, wondering nervously whether this were the right way to inquire for a lady of unsound mind.

The maid said, "Yes," and led Rose across a garden

crowded with flowers, and shaded here and there with a fine old tree. Never, Rose thought, had she seen so many flowers, never breathed air so fragrant and so fresh. Even the house to its roof was a glory of climbing flowers.

Within doors all was changed. The hall was simply furnished, and the room into which Rose was ushered was carpetless and bare. Poverty reigned here as undisputedly as wealth governed the garden. Through open folding doors there was an inner room, with shelves of books and a table strewn over with manuscripts. That, too, was poor and plain, without comfort or ornament.

Rose's quick eyes were noting the meanness and shabbiness of all these things, when Mary Hanlon came in to her and greeted her with kindly welcome.

Deirdrè, she said, was much better both in body and mind, so much better that they hoped, please God, she would in a year be quite well, though she still believed Michael was dead, but she had grown fond of his memory. "And she has got to like me," added Mary, smiling. "Some months ago I went to Ireland for the marr'ge of me second son, and oh! I could a' cried for very joy, she was so glad to see me when I returned."

Then Rose asked whether she might not see her friend, and Mary took her upstairs. Rose noticed with wonder that though the living rooms were bare, the stairs had some kind of covering.

"There is nothing to alarrum ye, Mrs. Campbell," said Mary, softly; "but go back, my dear, if ye are frightened."

"Oh no." Rose said she was not frightened, and with a feeling of mingled fear and heroism she followed Mrs. Hanlon into a large sunny room, a room softly carpeted, and furnished with quaint tables and deep easy-chairs, a room full of light and brightness, luxurious, yet for all its gaiety a semi-conventual apartment. The walls were hung with pictures, but they were all of religious subjects, and there were shrines and niches with statues of the Madonna and of saints. In

front of each were flowers, and in the deep bay window was a stand of growing plants. Deirdrè, in a crape dress, was bending over these.

"Deirdrè," said Mrs. Hanlon, and Rose, with a feeling of almost uncontrollable terror, saw the mad woman straighten herself and turn towards them. The change in Hanlon had made her look for a yet greater alteration in his wife. But the face that was turned towards her was as fresh and young and sweet as ever it had been—a trifle thinner, and with the look of doom a little more marked upon its lovely features, but good and true and fair to look on as ever.

The cry of pleasure at seeing Rose was just such a cry as Deirdrè would have given in bygone days, and the graceful, languid gait—that, too, was little changed from the time when Rose best remembered it.

"Ah! it is good of you," said Deirdrè in her sweet ringing voice, and holding both hands out to her friend, "it is good of you, dear Rose, to come to see a poor, crazy thing like me. How are you, dear? and Alex and the baby; how are they?"

"Oh, we are all quite well, darling," said Rose, her fears all gone; and she slipped her arm round her friend's waist. "And you?"

"Oh, I am sorely stricken, Rose," said the poor thing, who at the sight of the fresh face remembered all her fancied woes. "I cannot overcome my sorrows." She leaned her head against the wall and began to weep. "Can you wonder, Rose, that I am mad? Can you wonder? His father murdered mine, and he—he killed our little baby." She caught hold of her friend's hands and, turning, fixed her appealing eyes on Rose's face, "He killed our child, he buried it alive."

"No, dearest, no; indeed he didn't, Deirdrè; my dear, it isn't true?"

"What is the use to tell me it isn't true?" said Deirdrè, with gentle superiority, "you all tell me that, and I am sure

you mean it very kindly; but though I am mad, I am not mad enough to doubt my senses. I saw him do it, Rose. I saw him with my own eyes. I saw the earth heave as the little thing, my child and his, struggled to be free. I heard it scream. Of nights sometimes (when I am mad) I think I hear it still. I would have dug it up, I could have saved it, but Arthur came and tied my hands so that I could not move. I had to stand there helpless and hear it die, to see the earth heave, each time a little less. Rose, that was terrible, but it was more awful when it was silent and still."

She ceased, and sat looking sadly before her, seeing in her dark mind that imagined tragedy. Suddenly a quick colour flushed her pale face. She turned towards her friend.

"And yet I love him still. Rose, is that very wicked? I love him now—now that he has killed our baby, and oh! it breaks my heart that they have hanged him. No, no, don't tell me it's not true. Mother tried that. She even brought a man and told me it was Michael. Rose, you remember Michael? This man was twice his age. Michael was twenty-six. He was like youth and spring—like a fresh breeze and the morning sun. That gloomy street we lived in was a paradise when he was there. To see him move was life. Oh! it was life, and youth, and health. Now that man mother brought crept shuffling along, such an old weary gait. He was an old man, and I should say sad."

"But Michael at that time, Deirdre, was ill and sad."

"Sorrow and sickness, Rose, do not change us like that. I have been ill and I am very sad, and yet I am not greatly changed. Michael changed less than I. You saw him since his father died. How gay he was. There was still fun and laughter in his eyes. Rose, you remember Michael's eyes; they told you his whole mind. If he was vexed you saw it in his eyes; if he was sad or tired I always knew it by his eyes, and his eyes loved and smiled, and laughed. It can't be wrong to love his memory," she cried passionately. "Tell me it is not

wicked, for I cannot help it. Will heaven expect so much from such a poor crazy thing as I?"

"Poor Michael!" sobbed Mrs. Campbell; but she shrunk a little from her friend with a fear that she could not hide.

Deirdrè observed the shrinking. Her friend, she thought, was horrified at such guilty love. "So it is wrong," she said in a voice that was very sad.

"Sure, darlin', no!" said Mary, tenderly, taking her into her arms. "'Tis right that ye should love 'um; so right, my dear, that I'd try to forget that he killed the baby—and—and ahl your other sorrows. I'd try to remember only the happy days, and that he dearly loves you. 'Tis that will please heaven the most, my dear; forget your sorrows, love, and be happy in the home that Michael made for ye."

"And it is such a lovely home," said Rose, consolingly.

"Yes, it is lovely, is it not?" said Deirdrè, in a more cheerful voice. "And I do love the flowers. See, Rose, this holy water stoop I fill every day with white flowers—nothing but white—in memory of our baby; and that vase with the dark flowers—the red and purple ones—those are for Michael. I change them every day. Those pink and yellow roses are for you; I do those every second day. Each vase is for some friend, and I have always flowers enough (for there's a greenhouse for the winter). In the early spring Mr. Butler and Arthur sometimes had to go without; but I had always plenty for the others, and white ones for the baby." She went to the stoop, and bending forward kissed the flowers. "Always white ones," she said smiling dreamily, and arranging the pure blossoms with her long pale fingers.

"Come to the window," she cried, after a silence. "Come to the window, Rose, and look out. I sit here in this bay for hours, and look down on to the flowery garden. I walk there, too, every fine day and gather my own flowers. I may take all I like, and," she said with an arch smile, "I like them almost all. I shear the garden every day, but the old gardener does not mind. If I don't take enough he

sends up more, and on wet days he sends me up great baskets full—so sweet and beautiful. They are the only things I care for under heaven, and I think he knows it and is sorry for the poor mad woman, but”—she smiled again less gaily than before—“but he’s afraid of her for all that (and so, dear Rose, are you). If I go into the garden while he is working he goes away, so I have never had a chance to thank him. See, that is he, bending to tie that lily. I like to watch him work; he seems to love the flowers and to be so tender with them. Besides, no doubt his face is quite unlike—I’ve never seen it, and he is an old grey-headed man—but something in his figure and in his way of walking remind me,” she turned away her face, “of someone who is dead, but who was very dear to me.”

THE END.

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